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## Deaths

S.F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle , August 8, 1976

# Dean of winemakers dead at 95

Antonlo Perelli-Minetti, known as the dean of California winemakers, is dead at age 95.

Perelli-Minetti died Friday in a Bakersfield hospital.

The son of a prominent Italian winemaker, Perelli-Minetti came to the United States a year after his graduation from the Royal Institute of Viticulture and Enology in Italy in 1901.

When Prohibition was enacted in this country, Perelli-Minetti moved to Mexico, where he planted huge vineyards and became the U.S. liaison with Pancho Villa at Torreon.

After repeal, Perelli-Minetti returned to this country and worked in the wine business in Asti, Livermore, Lodi, Ukiah and San Francisco. Then he planted his own vineyards on land others thought un-



**ANTONIO PERELLI-MINETTI**  
Constantly experimenting

promising — the southern San Joaquin Valley near Delano.

Perelli-Minetti loved his work and was constantly experimenting. Last year he introduced a patented varietal grape called Perelli 101, which he said produced a full-bodied red wine "equal or better than the Napa Valley or Sonoma County wines I knew so well in my earlier years."

He did not introduce the wine into general consumption, saying he believed the grapes needed further fermentation, but he used some of them in blending other wines.

He founded his own company, A. Perelli-Minetti and Sons, in 1924. His family operates the California Wine Association's 1,200 acres of vineyards near Delano, whose winery crushes more than 100,000 tons of grapes a year.

Funeral arrangements were pending.











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California Wine Industry Oral History Project

Antonio Perelli-Minetti

A LIFE IN WINE MAKING

An Interview Conducted by  
Ruth Teiser in 1969





Antonio Perelli-Minetti being interviewed, May 17, 1969. Photograph by Catherine Harroun.



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(For Wines and Grapes see page 174)



## PREFACE

The California Wine Industry Oral History Series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated in 1969, the year noted as the bicentenary of continuous wine making in this state. It was undertaken through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, and under the direction of University of California faculty and staff advisors at Berkeley and Davis.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and wine making that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some wine making did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years (as yet treated analytically in few writings) will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of in many cases unique materials readily available for the purpose.

Three master indices for the entire series are being prepared, one of general subjects, one of wines, one of grapes by variety. These will be available to researchers at the conclusion of the series in the Regional Oral History Office and at the library of the Wine Institute.



The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the Director of The Bancroft Library.

Ruth Teiser  
Project Director  
California Wine Industry  
Oral History Series

1 March 1971  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley



## INTRODUCTION

Antonio Perelli-Minetti's interest in wine is inherited and life-long. Born in 1882 at Barletta, Italy, he knew wine making from childhood when, as he recounted in this interview, he worked with the men in his father's winery at crushing time. After graduating from the college of viticulture and enology at Conegliano, Italy, he came to California and immediately went to work for Italian Swiss Colony. That was in 1902, and he has been directly involved in the California wine industry ever since with the exception of the years between 1910 and 1917, which he spent mainly in Mexico involved in grape growing, wine making and adventure.

In the Pre-Prohibition years in California he was associated with a number of wineries including the old California Wine Company, the Simi family firm, and the property near Healdsburg previously owned by Frank Schmidt. He continued through the Prohibition years with California Grape Products Company and other enterprises. He was one of the organizers in 1929 of Fruit Industries, Ltd., and continued association with that group when it reorganized under the name California Wine Association, a cooperative until it was acquired by A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons in 1971. An inveterate viticultural experimenter, "Tony" Perelli-Minetti was a pioneer vineyardist in the Delano area and established his family firm there in the early 1930s.

During his long career, Mr. Perelli-Minetti has known virtually all of the leaders of the California wine industry and worked with many of them, including such famed figures as P.C. Rossi, A.R. Morrow, Joseph Di Giorgio, and Secondo Guasti. In this interview he discussed a wide range of subjects and people. His reminiscences reflect the fact that he is an outspoken individualist with a bright, quick mind and ideas about grapes and wine that are often controversial, a talented raconteur whose recollections frequently reflect his unconventional points of view and interpretations of events, and a man of unusual charm and unusual vitality.

Other discussions of many of these same subjects will be found in other interviews in this series; some are here cited in footnotes.

The interview was taped in four sessions, the first three in Mr. Perelli-Minetti's pleasant but simple office at the family winery at McFarland near Delano: two sessions on May 16 and a third on May 17, 1969. The fourth followed on May 28, when Mr. Perelli-Minetti made one of his frequent trips to San Francisco; it was held at the interviewer's studio. In this final session, some subjects discussed earlier were brought up for further discussion, and throughout the wide-ranging interview certain subjects recurred at intervals.



The interview transcript, with orthographic and other minor corrections and numerous marginal queries, went to Mr. Perelli-Minetti in August, 1970. His active schedule, which included some foreign winery consultation work and much travel, prevented him from completing his editing immediately. He returned the transcript in January 1973, having apparently gone over it carefully twice; it was considerably edited, with few deletions but expansion and clarification of wording that answered most of the questions and added further details. The final editing by the interviewer was completed after further correspondence and two meetings to verify certain other points.

Ruth Teiser  
Interviewer

October 1975  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley



(Interview #1 - May 16, 1969)

EARLY YEARS IN ITALY

Teiser: When were you born?

Perelli-Minetti: June 3, 1882. I will be eighty-seven.

Teiser: You certainly are a vigorous eighty-seven!

Perelli-Minetti: I drink good wine.

Teiser: Oh, that's it. [Laughter] Where were you born?

Perelli-Minetti: Barletta, Italy.

Teiser: Were members of your family winemakers?

Perelli-Minetti: For generations.

Teiser: In what part of Italy?

Perelli-Minetti: In the north, in Milano. My father was from Milano. All my family, the Perelli-Minetti, are from Milano. But my father happened to be in the south and saw my mother, and that settled him in the south.

Teiser: Your father's first name was Giuseppe?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: This book is by your father?



- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. How to improve wine making in Southern Italy.\* And if you read that, it's just as modern as today in some parts.
- Teiser: Your father had wineries in both Brindisi and Barletta?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right. My father was then [in 1876] associated with Julius Rakosi of the famous Hungarian family. When they separated, my father remained alone.
- Teiser: Would you repeat what you said earlier about the convict labor that your father used?
- Perelli-Minetti: As I remember--I was a little boy--we'd all go down to the plant and see the convicts come in all in chains, a block on one foot. The guard at the gate would remove the chains and they would be free to do all the work. They were paid just like anybody else. They had a chance to work and earn money.
- Teiser: And your father's secretary, you said, was a priest?
- Perelli-Minetti: So far as I remember, yes.
- Teiser: How did that happen?
- Perelli-Minetti: One of those things. A woman...
- Teiser: Did your father come to the United States?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes, he did.\*\* He died here in 1907.
- Teiser: Let's go back to your childhood and come up to that period later. You must have spent a good deal of time as a boy around the winery.

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\*Nil' Assoluta Necessita di Migliorare la Vinificazione delle Tre Puglie, idee di Giuseppe Perelli Minetti. Third edition. Barletta: 1876.

\*\*See also pp. 109-111.



- Perelli-Minetti: Yes, quite so. As a matter of fact, I went on and graduated from the viticultural college. In those days it was the Royal College of Viticulture and Oenology of Conegliano.
- Teiser: Had you gone through the regular schools before?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right.
- Teiser: Had you worked at the winery while you were a youngster? or had you just...
- Perelli-Minetti: No, we had to work.
- Teiser: What did you first do in the winery?
- Perelli-Minetti: [Stamps to demonstrate] Stamping grapes. I remember we had about a hundred vats, and a hundred men stamped the grapes. And we used to get in with the men, and then into their lunch too [laughter]. Because it always--what do you call it?--tasted better than your own lunch at home. Of course there was nothing but an onion, a piece of bread, and some anchovies, and wine, while at home we had soup--a lot of food--you know. But we liked the peasants' stuff. It's natural for a child. But then when I graduated from high school I went to Conegliano; graduated in 1901.
- Teiser: How long a course was it?
- Perelli-Minetti: Four years.
- Teiser: Did you have to study basic chemistry and bacteriology and all...
- Perelli-Minetti: Everything. Everything. A complete course, just like the University at Davis now.
- Teiser: Four years of intensive study must have made you very well informed in viticulture and enology.
- Perelli-Minetti: Well, the fact is that, with the exception of some of the theoretical parts, I knew all about what they were teaching.
- Teiser: Was the theoretical part the same as was known here?
- Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. The theoretical part is practically the same now all over.



Teiser: You graduated in 1901. Then what did you do immediately after that?

Perelli-Minetti: Went home. And then I came here.

Teiser: How did you happen to come here instead of staying there in your father's business?

Perelli-Minetti: In college, in Conegliano school, there were students from Australia, from South Africa, from different parts of Europe, from Hungary, from Argentina, and from the Balkans. I think there was one from China, I remember; and we used to discuss the question of where we would go when we graduated. One would pick one country, another picked another, and I picked California, principally for the reason that the Italian commercial attaché in the United States had published a book of all the wineries in the United States. It was a beautifully illustrated book about twelve inches by fourteen inches, folio, and about five inches thick. I cannot recollect the author's name.

Teiser: It was in Italian?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, in Italian. It was beautiful. All the wineries in the East, every winery in the United States. It was extremely interesting. Now that made me decide to go to California. I wanted to go to Mexico, but Mexico wasn't... My father objected to that.

Teiser: But he didn't urge you to stay with him?

Perelli-Minetti: Of course, but I didn't like to be a soldier. I ran away the morning that I was supposed to be inducted. The night before I took the train to Turin, and I went to the barracks where the army wouldn't think to find me, where a friend of the family, a lieutenant of the bersaglieri, was stationed. Then I moved to France, because from France there was not needed a passport to come to the U.S.A., while from Italy you had to have a passport. But the reason I came to the Italian Swiss Colony was because my father was president of the wine jury of the exposition of Turin in 1898. And then of Paris, 1900. And he was instrumental in getting the gold medal for Italian Swiss



Perelli-Minetti: Colony.\* We had a visit from Dr. [Giuseppe] Ollino.\*\* And naturally he told the beauties and possibilities of California. As a matter of fact, we were assured of employment in California.

Teiser: You say "we"?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, my brother came, too. Four of us graduated from the same school.

Teiser: How many children in your family?

Perelli-Minetti: Six boys.

Teiser: And four of you went to the same school? And two came here?

Perelli-Minetti: All of us in the end.

Teiser: At the same time?

Perelli-Minetti: No. One after another. We all came alone.. Different times. Then we brought my father over.

Teiser: Which one of you came first?

Perelli-Minetti: I think it was Joseph.

Teiser: When did he come?

Perelli-Minetti: It was about a couple of years before I did. I think he ran away because he failed in the examination at Avellino school.

Teiser: Around 1900, that would be?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. And he went to New York. We never heard from him for about two or three years, could never find him where he was. And then through an archbishop, who had some family connection with ours, we finally located him.

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\*The gold medal was awarded Italian Swiss Colony wine at Paris in 1900, and a diploma of honor was awarded it at Turin in 1898.

\*\*One of the founders of Italian Swiss Colony.



Teiser: Did he finally come to California?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: Then you came next?

Perelli-Minetti: No. I was in California before that. I came directly to California. My oldest brother came first to California.

Teiser: And what was his name?

Perelli-Minetti: Julius.

Teiser: When did he come here?

Perelli-Minetti: The year before. 1901.

Teiser: So Joseph came first to the United States. Then Julius came. Then you came. And then there were more?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Carlo, Caesar, Frederick. Frederick was the last.

Teiser: And when did your father come?

Perelli-Minetti: I believe a year before the earthquake.

Teiser: 1905. Now, we've got you all in this country.

#### TO CALIFORNIA

Teiser: You came then to California when you came to the United States?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, in a roundabout way.

Teiser: How did you journey?

Perelli-Minetti: After arriving in Torino\* the next morning, I went to see the lieutenant in the bersaglieri. I told him what I wanted, and he said, well, as long as it is only a few days it's all right. Nobody will look for you here. But

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\*Turin. See p. 4.



Perelli-Minetti: the question was how to get out of Italy. That night we went to some shady, you know, cabaret. As we entered there was a fight. A couple of fellows were attacking a young man, and they had out their daggers. The young fellow was defending himself with a chair. So I said to my friend who, being a bersagliere, was highly respected in Italy, "Let's help this boy or they'll kill him."

We managed to stop the fight and the young man introduced himself. I remember his name very well. I never think I will forget that name: Enrico Peritori. We sat down and had dinner, and he told me his father had ships that took lemons and oranges to New York, loaded in New York with goods for Newcastle. In Newcastle they loaded with coal for Sicily. He wanted me to go with him to Newcastle and then back to Sicily, and my trip would be gratis to New York on one of his ships. I said, "No, if I get out of Italy, I'm not going back." [Laughter] He said, "In Sicily, nobody will touch you." I said, "No matter what, it is still Italy, and that's the end of it."

Now the question was, how to get out of Italy. He suggested, "Take the night pullman to Paris and if the customs come, tell them not to bother you, and they will not bother you." That's what I did, and went to Paris. Well, I bought a ticket to New York and California before I left Paris. If I hadn't, maybe I would be in France still [laughing]. You know, I was twenty years old then. So I got to New York.

Teiser: Where did you sail from?

Perelli-Minetti: From Le Havre. We almost foundered. It was an old ship, and we were out in a big tempest. The Atlantic was tremendously rough and the ship lost a part of one of the propellers. But we got to New York.

Teiser: How long did it take you?

Perelli-Minetti: If I remember correctly, some ten to twelve days. I came in third class because they didn't have any fourth. You know, the money was gone, and I was feeling not too well on the ship.

Teiser: Incidentally, when you went to Paris, was that the first time you'd been in France?



Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: What did you think of the wines in France then compared to your own wine?

Perelli-Minetti: I didn't look at the wine; I looked at something else. [Laugh] No, I was too busy to think about the wine. We drank whatever wine there was.

When I got in New York, I was supposed to have \$60 to land, which I didn't have. I had only one centime.

Teiser: What happened?

Perelli-Minetti: They put me in a cage; you know those iron cages? And I saw the people that were on the boat with me coming with a little basket of food and crying. I asked them "Why are you crying?"

"Look Signore, look; venticinque lire, twenty-five liras, for this little food they gave us." Twenty-five liras to a man who was getting twenty cents a day, current wages in Italy in those days for field labor. Naturally they knew the value of money, and when you charged them twenty-five liras for what probably was worth less, they resented it and they were crying because it just hurt. Then a waiter came into the cage and wanted to know if I wanted to go to eat. I said, "No." And he came two, three times.

Finally he said something I didn't understand because I spoke no English. But from the expression of his face, he called me a bad name. I just jumped on him and I just licked the devil out of him. I had him down when a policeman came and grabbed me, and my God, he looked to me as if he was ten feet tall. Tremendous big Irish man. He spoke Italian perfectly, and he said to me, "You haven't even reached this country and you are fighting; they'll send you back." I answered him, "I thought this was a free country where people would have respect for each other, but it doesn't seem to be the case, so I prefer to go back." He asked, "Why did you fight?" I said, "I don't know. He insulted me. He called me a bad name. Ask him." He asked the waiter, "What did you say to him?" "I called him a dago or s.b. or something."



Perelli-Minetti: Then he asked me, "Aren't you hungry?" I said, "Yes, I'm hungry, but that doesn't mean that I have to eat, because to eat I have to pay, and I haven't any money." And he said to me, "How do you expect to land?"

"I don't know."

"Well," he said, "you go and eat now, and it will be free." I said, "All right, I'll go and eat," and to myself, "This fellow's going to spit in the food, he's going to-- God knows what he's going to do." So I said to the waiter, "You bring me two eggs in the shell, and that's all." I broke the eggs and I drank them, and that was all my food. I said to myself, "He is not going to have the satisfaction of spitting in my food."

At about four o'clock the policeman came in dressed in civilian clothes. Actually, I didn't recognize him. He asked me to follow him to the chief's office. What he told the chief I don't know, but the chief told me I was free to go.

Teiser: What season was it? What weather in New York?

Perelli-Minetti: Winter. There were a couple of feet of snow in New York, and the boat had to follow an ice breaker to come into port. Times were different. I mean, the climate was different in those days than it is today. Very much different. I've seen so much change in California, it would astound anybody.

Teiser: This was the winter of 1902, then?

Perelli-Minetti: February, 1902. From New York, by a boat, I went to Norfolk. I've never seen, never dreamed of seeing such beautiful scenery in my life, the entrance into Norfolk's sound was so beautiful that I never went back, because I don't want to lose that picture. I still hold it in my mind. Oh, it was something hard to imagine, especially coming from the old country, you know, and this.... Oh, it was so beautiful.

Teiser: That's what we think when we go to Italy.

Perelli-Minetti: But it's different. This was nature. Well, from there I gradually got to California.



Teiser: Did you come on a train?

Perelli-Minetti: On a train. Second class. In those days, it was wooden benches.

Teiser: Sit up?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, sit up. At that age you don't give a darn whether you sleep or not.

Teiser: It was still winter when you got to California?

Perelli-Minetti: It was toward the end of February 1902 when I arrived in San Francisco. It took seven days, the train from Norfolk to San Francisco.

#### SAN FRANCISCO

Teiser: Do you remember what San Francisco was like when you first saw it?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. Quite a beautiful city of some 240,000 people, so I was told. I worked for Italian Swiss Colony.

Teiser: Did you go directly to Italian Swiss Colony?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, Mr. Pietro Rossi invited me to lunch with Mr. Andrea Sbarboro and a Mr. Rocca, then Italian consul in San Francisco. Mr. Fontana was there too.\*

Teiser: You were really well escorted for a young man.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, that's true.

Teiser: Did you go to the Fior d'Italia?

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\*Pietro C. Rossi, Andrea Sbarboro and Mark J. Fontana were founders of what was then still called the Italian-Swiss Agricultural Colony; Rossi was then president. See also pp. 11, 18-21 and 111-117. Further details of the organization were recalled by Edmund A. Rossi in Italian Swiss Colony and the Wine Industry, an interview in this series completed in 1971.



Perelli-Minetti: No. We went to a Washington Street restaurant, I forgot the name, and they brought a steak that was really big.

Teiser: [Laughing] Had you ever seen one that big before?

Perelli-Minetti: No, because, well, at home, the steaks were individual. But this one was a large one and they cut it into pieces.

Teiser: Did you go to the Fior d'Italia restaurant soon after that?

Perelli-Minetti: I've been eating at the Fior d'Italia ever since. Twenty-five cents was a big meal in those days, and a pint of wine included.

Teiser: Good wine?

Perelli-Minetti: Very good wine.

Teiser: But at that first lunch, did they tell you all about San Francisco?

Perelli-Minetti: No. They told me the possibilities in California, and so forth and so on.

Teiser: Incidentally, which Mr. Fontana was it?

Perelli-Minetti: Marco. He was a little fellow, a very little man. He was the father of the canning industry. He's the one who established the canning industry in California. I think it became California Packing Corporation--the company that is today.\*

Teiser: Did he tell you about the canning industry? What possibilities there were for a young man in that?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, but I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in wine, and so Mr. Rossi told me that my diploma doesn't mean anything in the United States, that what meant was the performance of the individual himself. And that I had to

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\*Mark J. Fontana founded the California Fruit Canners Association, which later became part of California Packing Corporation (Del Monte Foods).



- Perelli-Minetti: start from the very bottom and work myself up. So I started washing barrels, mending barrels, and then gradually built up, and six months after, they sent me to Asti as assistant winemaker.
- Teiser: You had spent the six months in San Francisco, had you?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right.
- Teiser: What was Italian Swiss doing there then?
- Perelli-Minetti: They had a big winery, a five story building on Battery and off Broadway, where wines from various parts of the state were received, to supply customers with. It was a blending and bottling plant. And it was quite a big place. P.C. Rossi was the president of the company, and [Sophus] Federspiel was the manager, under Mr. Rossi. And George Dondero was the chief auditor. I mention his name for the fact that later he withdrew from Italian Swiss Colony and joined with Ciocca-Lombardi [Wine] Company, which later bought the building of Italian Swiss Colony. That was after the earthquake.
- Teiser: Where did you live in San Francisco?
- Perelli-Minetti: I lived on Filbert Street at the home of the mother of the manager of Italian Swiss Colony in New York. Mr. Rossi had arranged it for me, to have a room at her place. She was a woman about seventy. I used to walk to a place on Broadway, near the biscuit place, for breakfast.
- Teiser: Near the American Biscuit Company building?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. On its side was an Irish restaurant, so I used to have breakfast there, and then go down to the winery, which was in the next block. At seven o'clock we had to go to work, seven to twelve and one to six. We were getting \$10 a week.
- Teiser: Where did you eat lunch?
- Perelli-Minetti: For \$10 a month we had lunch and dinner at a restaurant-- it was a boarding place--in the Colombo Hotel on Broadway, near what was then Dupont and now Grant Avenue.
- Teiser: Did they have good wine?



Perelli-Minetti: Good wine. All the wine you would want, all the food you would eat.

Teiser: When you came here to the United States and tasted the wines, did they taste like the wines that you had had in Italy?

Perelli-Minetti: There was a little difference, but a difference that you overcame right away, and you liked them. But the wines then were good wines.

Teiser: They were better wines than now?

Perelli-Minetti: Much better. You'll find that in those days, like California Wine Association, Italian Swiss Colony--that was before the earthquake--Lachman & Jacobi, Schlesinger Brothers, and all those big companies, carried some wine for fifteen years. California Wine Association had the wines that were fifteen years old, maybe a couple of million gallons.

Teiser: Didn't they have a good deal of spoilage?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh no. It was taken good care of. The wine was bottled without much processing, practically just a filtration. It was aged properly and bottled, and no sediment in the bottles. Most wine was shipped in barrels. The wines in those days were made like in the old country, as a hundred years ago.

#### REMARKS ON WINE PASTEURIZATION

Teiser: They were not pasteurized?

Perelli-Minetti: Very seldom.

Teiser: Does that make a difference?

Perelli-Minetti: It makes a difference quite a bit; I would think so. To pasteurize, it kills all the yeast in the wines. Nature furnishes the yeast, many kinds. We don't know how some function. Quite a number we ignore their function on the stomach, on the body, what influence they have. That "bloom" that you see on the berries is constituted of a



Perelli-Minetti: couple hundred different yeasts that come from the ground.

In 1930, I was with Fruit Industries. We built the plant in Delano\* to take care of the grapes. That plant was brand new. We made a concentrate. We started the plant in June and crushed 30,000 tons, which was a big crush in those days. And that was during Prohibition, 1930, two years before Prohibition was removed.\*\* Food Industries had the laboratories in San Francisco, and one day I received a note that our winery was contaminated. I answered the letter saying, I'm sorry but the man who wrote the letter knows very little of what he's talking about, because if our plant here, which is spotless and brand new, is contaminated, the other old plants which are now part of the Fruit Industries must be like sewers, but not this winery.

"We are sending a bacteriologist down," was the answer. He came and took slides all over the winery, and found this wild yeast which caused the trouble in the concentrate. I said, "All right, now you come with me." We went in the vineyard about a mile away from the winery. I said, "Now you put the slides here." He said, "What for?" I said, "You put the slides here; I'm going to teach you and that jackass in San Francisco something that apparently you don't know, because if you knew it he wouldn't have written the letter he wrote." He put the slides, and he found, among other yeasts, the same wild yeast. I said, "Now let's go about two miles away, where there's no vineyard." He put the slides down and found the same yeasts. I said, "Now let's go up to the mountains." So we went about ten miles away in the foothills. I said, "You put the slides here." And then we went about six thousand feet elevation, way up past California Hot Springs. "Now you put the slides here." He says, "What for?" I said, "You put the slides here." And he finds the same yeast, and there were no wild vines. I said, "That's nature. When the grapes are ripening, or any fruit is ripening, the yeast gets to the fruit; otherwise the fruit could not ferment. So when you get a little crack, the yeast gets in, and the grapes sour up."\*\*\*

So, now, those 200 or 250 yeasts, of which we know very little, produce some effects on the body when you drink wine

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\*See also pp. 61-62.

\*\*Final ratification of the Twenty-First Amendment repealing Prohibition came on December 5, 1933.

\*\*\*See also p. 64.



Perelli-Minetti: that is not pasteurized. But when you pasteurize wine, you remove nature from it. And based on that, I cured a drunkard. He was a young man, university graduate. He had lost all his business. I gave him work in the winery, and by ten o'clock in the morning at the beginning he'd be drunk on whiskey. It was during the war. We couldn't get any help. There was my opportunity to rehabilitate this man. I had several Italians working in the plant. I said to them, "Gradually bring Mr. X to have lunch with you. Give him some wine to drink." And he started drinking wine. The more wine he drank, the less whiskey. After a year he was completely cured. He was elected justice of the peace, and then his old partner sold him back part of the business, and he was able to educate his family.

Teiser: Is much California wine unpasteurized today?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. We don't pasteurize our wine. It's not necessary because the process, the cold process and the way things are done today, it's almost unnecessary to pasteurize. But the trouble is this, that the wines now are too young. But they're still good wines. They're still healthier than hard liquor.

When I was in school, we used to make experiments of the effect of the wine. I will mention just one. We took two pints of the same wine. We distilled the wine of one pint and gave the alcohol to a dog, and the wine itself of the other pint to another dog. The dog that drank the wine woke up, shook himself, and got away. The dog that got the alcohol never got up; just died. Of course that distillation wasn't pure like we do today, but still it is changed completely. The distilled alcohol is different from that of the wine.

Teiser: Well, wine tastes better anyway.

Perelli-Minetti: It tastes better, but the American can't see that.

Teiser: More and more of us can, I guess.

Perelli-Minetti: The younger generation is taking more after the wine.



## PROHIBITION AND THE WINE INDUSTRY

Perelli-Minetti: It's too bad that Prohibition destroyed the best industry that could have generated a wine drinking people rather than a hard liquor drinking people. I wrote to Roosevelt, begging him not to open the saloons, and to just allow dry wines free, and sweet wines and liquors controlled. Because during Prohibition people drank more wine than they drank before Prohibition. California used to ship grapes to the East. No matter where you went to a speakeasy for dinner, you drank a cup of wine, because you ate forbidden fruit quicker than you would the fruit you can buy any time you want it. I made a survey in San Francisco for Fruit Industries, and San Francisco and the Bay Area consumed fifteen million gallons of wine.

Teiser: When was this?

Perelli-Minetti: During Prohibition. In 1930 I was operated for appendicitis, and a young fellow that used to work for me when I was with Simi [winery] came to see me. He had been a policeman; then he was in the fire department. I didn't remember him-- it was so many years and I had gone to Mexico. So I said to him, "I am going to make a survey of the wine that's consumed, which I can figure through the grapes that are coming to San Francisco." He took me to all the wineries that were in San Francisco during Prohibition.

Teiser: You mean in homes?

Perelli-Minetti: No, no, no. Good sized wineries. Thirty, forty, fifty thousand gallons, maybe more. In big apartment house basements, with 10,000-20,000 gallon tanks. Because San Francisco was the only place in the United States where the distribution of wine was practiced without guns, and done so quietly that nobody knew anything about its traffic. The scavengers\* I was told would deliver the wine to the house and put the demijohn into the trash can on the back porch, and pick up the refuse and the empty demijohn. That's why no bootleggers could get into San Francisco. A couple

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\*Garbage collection in San Francisco was handled by the company known as the Scavengers' Protective Association.



Perelli-Minetti: of people came from the East and tried, and the next day they were found in the Bay. Several from New York and Chicago came here, two or three people, and that stopped. They too were found in the Bay.

The grapes were sold freely because every family had the right to buy grapes and make wine, 200 gallons [a year per family], during Prohibition. But the grapes went into San Francisco. Checking with the railroads, checking with the people that sold the grapes at market, the wholesale produce men, there came over 100,000 tons of grapes into San Francisco and the Bay Region.

Teiser: And the scavengers did not process the grapes?

Perelli-Minetti: No, they did not. They were processed by bootleggers. I met several of the bootleggers, who because of this fellow, showed me the wineries and everything else. This man had been a policeman and fireman; he knew everybody and the bootleggers talked to me freely. Nobody would bother them because there was no scandal in San Francisco; there were no scandals like in New York and other places. The thing was quietly done. Now if you take the figure 100,000 tons of grapes, and that a ton of grapes will produce about 160 to 170 gallons, that's 16 or 17 million gallons that was consumed then. Before Prohibition, California Wine Association alone carried about 35 million gallons of dry wine.

Teiser: Was that pretty good wine they made in San Francisco during Prohibition?

Perelli-Minetti: Beautiful wine!

Teiser: It really was?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh God, as good a wine as you can find any place. All grapes from the north, except a few grapes from Lodi.  
[Pause while tape is turned]

Teiser: Mostly from the north, you said...

Perelli-Minetti: From around the Bay, and north of the Bay, because many grapes were grown in Alameda County and Contra Costa, Santa Cruz, San Jose.

Teiser: The men who made the wine, the bootleggers, had they been in the wine business before Prohibition?



Perelli-Minetti: I don't think so.

Teiser: How'd they learn, I wonder.

Perelli-Minetti: Well, maybe they had a winemaker.

Teiser: Someone who knew from before?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

#### WORKING FOR ITALIAN SWISS COLONY, 1902-1903

Teiser: Let's go back to 1902 again. So you lived in San Francisco for six months?

Perelli-Minetti: Six months, and used to walk down to the winery, work all day, and then go back home. And lived with this American old lady and talked to her all I could, and then took English lessons at night.

Teiser: Where did you take the English lessons?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, I went to the Washington night school for about a week, and then I thought it was much easier to take private lessons. So there was a niece of Mr. Sbarboro that was a school teacher, and I used to go to her home, which wasn't very far. She lived on Columbus. I would go there at around eight p.m., one hour every night.

Teiser: So by the time you got up to Asti, you knew pretty much English?

Perelli-Minetti: Quite so, yes.

Teiser: How big was the operation at Asti when you first saw it?

Perelli-Minetti: It was quite a large place. The fermenting room there was a brand new one. They built it the year before. It could accommodate 5,000 tons of grapes in one crushing. But the operation of Asti, aside from its crushing, was the contribution of many other small wineries in Sonoma County that made the wine and delivered it to Asti. Asti was quite a large place, had several million gallons capacity.



Perelli-Minetti: Had one tank half a million gallons, then the largest in California. Quite a showplace.

Teiser: This was the first actual wine making in the United States you had seen then?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: Was it much different from what had been done in your father's winery?

Perelli-Minetti: No, no different. Only Asti had more machinery that we had in Italy.

Teiser: Like what? Pumps?

Perelli-Minetti: No, not so much pumps, because we had hand pumps too. But the crushers, complete winery equipment.

Teiser: How about filtering?

Perelli-Minetti: The filters were of different types. We had the pulp filter mostly in those days.

Teiser: Did you think it was a good winery? By your standards?

Perelli-Minetti: I thought it was a good winery, yes, very good winery for those days.

Teiser: Who was in charge then there?

Perelli-Minetti: The superintendent of Asti Colony was a Swiss Italian by the name of Allegrini.\* The winemaker was a Piemontese. I was told that the first winemaker was a Swiss Italian, when the Italian Swiss Colony was first incorporated and they built the first unit,\*\* and the first wine made there

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\*Probably Julius Allegrini. See Edmund A. Rossi, op. cit.

\*\*Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony was incorporated in 1881, but the first winery was not built until 1887.



Perelli-Minetti: was 100,000 gallons. He was from Switzerland. The story went that in Switzerland they had to close the windows and doors and sometimes heat up the place in order to ferment, and this fellow did the same thing over there in Asti [laughing]. He made vinegar.

Italian Swiss Colony had a big winery at Fulton.

Teiser: Then?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. They had a big winery in Kingsburg and Madera.

Teiser: So your job there at Asti was as...

Perelli-Minetti: ...assistant winemaker, shipping clerk, and timekeeper.

Teiser: Was a man named Enrico Prati there then?

Perelli-Minetti: No, he followed me. He came after I left. Mr. Prati came from Argentina.

Teiser: Who were you assistant to?

Perelli-Minetti: Hannibal, like the Carthaginian general that attacked Rome, was his given name. His family name I can't remember.

Teiser: How long then did you work there?

Perelli-Minetti: I went there in June 1902 and I left there in February 1903. And there's a little story to the case.

The crushing season started I think in August. During the grape season Asti employed a weighmaster, a name I can never forget, Shirley Black. (He died a year or so ago.) Mr. Rossi and Mr. Sbarboro were together, and I think Mr. Allegrini too. I said to Mr. Rossi: "I have a man by the name of Shirley Black, but nobody has told me how much his wage is." So Mr. Rossi said to me, "\$125 a month. You know, he is American, and if we don't pay them good wages, they criticize us." I said to myself, "I am in the wrong church. I am getting \$75 a month because I am Italian and the other fellow's getting \$125 a month because he is American." So Mr. Rossi must have seen the muscles in my face work. I didn't say anything. He was going back to Italy, and I said to myself I would wait his return. When Mr. Rossi came back from Italy, he came up to Asti. That was in February. With Mr. Rossi was Percy Morgan, president



Perelli-Minetti: of California Wine Association, Mrs. Morgan, and Mr. A.R. Morrow, general superintendent of California Wine Association. They came by the winery. It was chill, and Mr. Rossi asked me if I had an overcoat for Mrs. Morgan. I had a coat with cape and hood made of camel hair, long hair, so I handed it to Mr. Rossi, and they drove on to Chianti, one of the vineyards. When they came back--it was about five in the afternoon--Mr. Morrow (he was a young fellow then) got off the big rig, with three seats with two horses, and said to me. "Mrs. Morgan wants to buy your coat." So I said, "No, my coat is not for sale."

Well, I had the idea in my mind to resign my position, because I resented the fact that one because he was an American was getting more. I said to myself, "If I go to work for Americans, if Americans feel the same way, I'm the one that gets the benefit." So I said to Mr. Morrow, "No, it is not for sale, and I will not sell it." Then I went to the carriage and I said to Mrs. Morgan, "Mr. Morrow asked me to sell this coat. The coat is not for sale, but if you wish to accept it as a present from me, I'd be very happy." So she said yes. So Mr. Morrow said to me, "Any time you want a job, come and see me." I said to myself, "Well, here it's done already." So I said to Mr. Morrow, "I'll be coming to see you next week." So I got the job from Mr. Morrow.

#### THE CALIFORNIA WINE ASSOCIATION, 1903-1904

Teiser: [Laughing] When was that?

Perelli-Minetti: In 1903. And so I worked around on Brannan Street then, all for red wines. California Wine Association had two big wineries, one on Third Street where the Wells Fargo Bank is now for white wines and head offices. Then in the next block all the sweet wine winery. They had several million gallons capacity there. All the big companies were concentrated in San Francisco.

Teiser: But did they actually make wine there?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, no. Just blend, store, and bottle. Most of the wine went out in barrels. That's the way the wine was shipped



Perelli-Minetti: in those days. Because the people bought wine in barrels. Now for instance Vermont was dry in those days, but you could ship a carload of wine to an agent; each barrel was marked with purchaser's name, and the agent would make delivery. I believe the express company shipped them.

Teiser: They had to be marked?

Perelli-Minetti: Each barrel had to be marked with the individual who was going to receive the wine. But that was only for the dry states that allowed it. Some dry states like Kansas, you couldn't bring it in. But the big markets were Philadelphia and the mining countries, and Chicago, New York, and Boston. Those were the big markets in those days. So was New Orleans, especially. California Wine Association was the big company. They carried some 35 million gallons of wine on hand.

Teiser: Did most of their wine go to California, or did most of it go east?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, most went east. Every company, most of their wine went east.

Teiser: What was your first job, then, with Mr. Morrow? What did you do there?

Perelli-Minetti: Receiving the wine and transferring into storage. The wine would come in puncheons from the different wineries, unloaded on the sidewalk. We'd roll the big puncheons in, you know.

[Interruption]

Teiser: How much did a puncheon hold?

Perelli-Minetti: About 160 gallons. A big draying company would bring it in from the railroad station.

Teiser: How was it handled?

Perelli-Minetti: The drayage trucks would bring the puncheons from the railroad. They had low beds less than a foot off the ground. The drayman would roll off the puncheons on the sidewalk.

Teiser: Just roll them by hand?



Perelli-Minetti: Roll by hand; no effort to do that. And I would pump the wine into the big tanks.

Then after that, Mr. Morrow sent me to Livermore to the Pioneer Winery to make wine there.

Teiser: What was the Pioneer Winery?

Perelli-Minetti: That was owned by the California Wine Association.

Teiser: Had they started it, or had it been started by someone who then put it into the Association, do you know?

Perelli-Minetti: No, I don't know that.\* I made wine there and after the season a watchman would take care. I was there all through the vintage, had only one pump and one crusher with an auto gas engine. The pomace was pressed, then washed, and the wash was sent to Stockton for distillation, and the wine was sent to San Francisco as they needed it. California Wine Association would have a sample of every tank of wine from every winery that they got wine from. So they would make the blend from those samples and bring the wine accordingly. It was pretty hard for any other winery to sell any wine to a California Wine Association customer because California Wine Association would keep the continuity of the blend like nobody else could. Mr. [Charles] Ash,\*\* who later, when Prohibition came, became head chemist of the California Packing Corporation...

Teiser: But he was with California Wine Association at that time?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. He started there as a young fellow, and then moved into the other company.

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\*According to Winemaking in California. III. The California Wine Association by Ernest Peninou and Sidney Greenleaf, the Pioneer Winery was established by Camille Aquillon and Gottardo Bustelli in 1883 and later sold to the California Wine Association.

\*\*See also Charles Ash's "Reminiscences of Pre-Prohibition Days" in Proceedings of the American Society of Enologists, 1952.



Teiser: And he handled their blending?

Perelli-Minetti: He was head of the laboratory where all blends were made, and Mr. Morrow would pass on the blends.

Teiser: I see. It was a good system? Still is, I guess, isn't it?

Perelli-Minetti: It is. We have the same system.

Teiser: How long did you stay in Livermore?

Perelli-Minetti: Through the vintage, and then went back to San Francisco, and then to see my brother in Asti.

Teiser: Which brother was this?

Perelli-Minetti: Julius.\* That's the oldest one. He had been transferred from the Italian Swiss Colony Sebastopol winery, and I was going to Asti for a visit with him. I was sitting next to a gentleman with white hair, white moustache, and pock marks, very handsome (his name was Nardini, I found out later), and he asked me where I was going. I said I was going to Asti. Naturally, when you said Asti, you meant wine because at Asti there was nobody except Italian Swiss Colony. He said, "Do you know anything about wine?" I said, "Yes, I'm a graduate winemaker." "Oh," he said, "then you are not going to Asti." I said, "Oh yes, I'm going to." He said, "No, you're not going to Asti, you're going to get off at Healdsburg with me. I'm Mr. Nardini of the Oliveto Wine Company. We're in trouble, and I want you to get off there and we'll telephone your brother, and if necessary we'll send you over by horse and buggy," because that was the transportation in those days.

#### WINE MAKING IN HEALDSBURG, 1904-1906

Perelli-Minetti: So I got off at Healdsburg. Lorenzini had charge of the winery. There were three partners, [A.] Nardini, [Domenico] Lorenzini, and [William] Franceschini. Franceschini had charge of the winery in San Francisco. Mr. Nardini was the

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\*He was also sometimes called by the Italian form of his first name, Giulio.



Perelli-Minetti: salesman. He went all over the United States. They had two wineries, the Oliveto Wine Company, which Miss [Edith] Passalacqua owns now and where they store the wine for Paul Masson, I think. And they had about seven or eight hundred thousand gallons of wine, lots of wine in those days, all spoiled. And then they had about 3,500 barrels of wine throughout the United States that all had been rejected. So I did my best to put together a blend, because they were in bad with the bank, they were going broke. So I put together a blend (I think the first blend was 100,000 gallons) and sent a carload to New Orleans and a carload to Chicago. And the wine was highly accepted. And so Mr. Nardini oversold that quantity. Then after this blend was finished, Mr. Nardini asked me to go to Chicago.

I went to Chicago and we opened a place on Kinzie Street off Fiftieth Street Bridge I think. And we got all the barrels that had been rejected there, and I put up a small tank. The wine was beautiful, but it was cloudy, full of sediments. I sent every day an Italian helper to Swift and Company to get five gallons of blood (it is the best clarifier), and at night we emptied 20 barrels into a tank and dumped the blood in, mixed it. And by morning all sediments were down at the bottom of the tank, and we would draw the clear wine from the top. It went just like hotcakes; it was so beautiful, really it was. The wine was good. So the company made money from that point there, because we sold all the wine and got the money.

Then I went back to Healdsburg to figure what to do with the spoiled wine that was left there. I had them buy 2,000 or 3,000 tons of grapes, and I re-fermented all the wine and made a better wine than that they made from straight grapes. So things went up right away. The bank was paid. The wine was sold. And they prospered. And I was offered one-fourth of the company, for \$7,500, to be paid by the dividends. I was getting there also \$75 a month and my board.

So I went to Mr. Rossi, because Mr. Rossi, when I left, said, "Any time I can be of help, any advice you want, come and see me, I'll be glad to give it." So I went to see Mr. Rossi and I explained to him my position. Mr. Rossi said to me, "Well, there are two alternatives to this one. It's up to you to decide. If these people are honest, then make a deal with them. They have control



Perelli-Minetti: of the company because they're three. They'd own three-fourths of the company, you'd own one-fourth. But if they want to keep you there and never make any dividend, you'd just be working the rest of your life for the wages. Now it's up to you to decide what to do."

Then Simi Land Company--Mr. Simi had died--

Teiser: Which? There were two Simi brothers weren't there?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, Pietro and Joseph.

Teiser: And both of them had died by then?

Perelli-Minetti: Within a month of each other. (Pietro was in San Francisco. They had what they called a pint house there in San Francisco on Green and Dupont some place.\* A fellow by the name of [Vincent W.] Monti was in charge.)

I remember that the first time I went to Healdsburg, I went to the station. I don't remember why. There was an old man with sash and no stockings [laugh]. He had linens wrapped around, quite an old man. He lifted his cane, and he said, "Hey you," in Italian. He said, "You're the Italian that just came here; you're the new Italian neighbor." I said, "I don't know; I've been here just a week; I don't know."

He said, "I'm going to give you an advice." He said, "Look at me."

I said, "Why should I look at you for?" I said, "What's the reason for it?"

He said, "Look at me." He said, "When I came to this country, I was young like you are now. I made up my mind to make money and then when I came to be fifty, I would quit and enjoy myself. I'm ready to die, and I've not been able to enjoy myself because the more money I made, the more slave I became." He said, "You enjoy yourself every day as you go along, and don't do the mistake I made." Within less than a month after, he died.

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\*431 Green Street.



Teiser: And who was he?

Perelli-Minetti: Joseph Simi, Giuseppe Simi. He had two daughters by his second wife. One [Elvira] married the Scatena boy [Louis] and he died. And the other married [Fred] Haigh. He was the cashier of the Sonoma Bank of which Mr. Warfield was the president in charge of the bank there. She's still alive.

Teiser: That's Isabel? Mrs. Fred Haigh?

Perelli-Minetti: Isabel. Joseph, from the first wife, had one son and one daughter.

Teiser: Who was the boy?

Perelli-Minetti: Louis. He just drank too much. The daughter was married to, I think a Yugoslav.\*

Pietro had one son and two daughters, and all spent money like water after the father died, and got in trouble with the bank. One daughter of Pietro was married to a tailor, a Mr. Pinella, a very handsome, polished man. The other was married to a Mr. Krone and had a little boy, I remember, because I took the little boy away with me when his father died.

Louis Simi lived in Healdsburg. He talked big, acted big, spent big, but never paid anybody. And so the Simi Company was in bad shape. And so, through the bank, I was offered a position with Simi, \$250 a month. I took it right away because I had more prospect. Then the earthquake came.

#### THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE

Teiser: Oh, were you in Healdsburg at the time of the earthquake?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: Things shook up a good deal there, didn't they?

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\*Annie Simi married a man named Antonovich.



Perelli-Minetti: Yes, it did destroy a lot. The biggest damage the earthquake did was in Santa Rosa. I know it killed lots of people; the army shot lots of people that were caught in the windows, when the hotel was burning and begged to be shot. I forget the name of it. And Doctor [George C.] Pardee was governor at that time. He sent a call to the Masonic Hall for volunteers. I had joined recently, I think it was just a week or so before, so I went. Its headquarters were in Oakland at the hotel. Franklin Hotel, I think. So we met there, and we had to put on arm bands and hat bands. I was assigned to North Beach in San Francisco to take care and remove everybody from North Beach. I was the authority then, and the first thing I did was to commandeered all the boats to Oakland.

Teiser: What kind of boats were these?

Perelli-Minetti: Small boats, fishing boats. All had sails and motors and the Japanese operated them.

Teiser: Weren't there a lot of Italian-owned fishing boats too?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, but maybe they weren't there, I don't know. The point is that in Oakland the people would be fed at the piers, or at the landing of the ferry boat. The Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe would give free ticket to any part of the United States and Canada, so people started leaving and going east. There were tremendous tables full of food for everybody to enjoy. The army was ready to blow up the gas tanks in North Beach\* and I had to hurry in moving the people. To stop the fire the army had to blow up one block after another on Van Ness Avenue, where the fire was controlled.

Mr. Ariberto Cora, of the Cora Vermouth--Cora Vermouth had a store on Jackson Street--he was in partnership with my brother Carlo. Mr. Cora, Mrs. Cora, and his sister-in-law, myself, and two brothers of mine moved into a penthouse on top of the Franklin Hotel, just a big room with all windows all around.

The navy had declared courtmartial. Anybody caught stealing was shot on the spot and a few were killed while

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\*In the end, it did not.



Perelli-Minetti: trying to get the rings off of people who had been killed in the debris. They were shot on the spot. The cashier of Swiss-American Bank was shot by accident. It was a mistake. He did not answer the "Who goes there?"

Teiser: What was his name?

Perelli-Minetti: Sartori, I think, was the name. That was one of the tragedies. Young fellow. He was killed, I think, on Sansome Street.

Teiser: How long did you stay in the city, then, on that detail?

Perelli-Minetti: About two weeks.

Teiser: How long had you been with Simi by then?

Perelli-Minetti: I went to Simi I think in 1905.

Teiser: So you'd been there about a year.

Perelli-Minetti: No, I don't think I was a year. Maybe I was, I don't remember exactly.

Teiser: This was in April, 1906, that the...

Perelli-Minetti: The earthquake shook and destroyed all the wineries in San Francisco. The wine just was lost completely.

Teiser: All of them!

Perelli-Minetti: All of them. It broke the containers spilling all the contents. Dry wine in those days was about 11 to 12¢ a gallon wholesale. The only wine that was left was in the country. That which didn't belong to the companies went up to 28¢ a gallon. Frank Schmidt had about 250,000 gallons of wine. He had a contract with California Wine Association for 12¢.

Teiser: Where was he making his wine?

Perelli-Minetti: At his place.

Teiser: Where was that?

Perelli-Minetti: Healdsburg. Louis Foppiano owns the place now. Two of my



Perelli-Minetti: oldest children were born there. I'll come to that. You've seen Foppiano's new home? Louis Foppiano's new home?

Teiser: No.

Perelli-Minetti: Right behind it is the old winery. The one we had.

#### RETURN TO HEALDSBURG

Perelli-Minetti: Frank Schmidt was an old man, seventy-nine years old. He wanted to go back to Germany, and I bought his wine, I think for 18-19¢, something like that. California Wine Association boycotted him, so he decided to sell. First he wanted me to go and work for him. I said, "No, no."

"I'm going to Germany, I'll leave you in charge. I may never come back."

I said, "No."

"Then I'll sell you the place."

I said to myself, "I'd like to buy the place. How am I going to raise the money?"

I bought it for \$50,000; \$5,000 down when the escrow was completed, with the understanding any money that was taken in by selling anything on the ranch up to \$10,000 had to be paid on account of the purchase price.

Well, there was the \$5,000 to be paid. I looked into the tanks; I got out about \$800 worth of cream of tartar. There were quite a number of cows. I sold the cows. I think about a couple hundred head. I sold the cows for 3 1/2¢ a pound on the hoof. And so I practically paid the \$5,000. My son, Mario, has the contract framed--\$50 down on a \$50,000 purchase.

But that isn't all of it. He told me that I could make more money buying grapes and making wine. So I said, "What am I going to use for money?" I talked him into putting some money in the bank for me, so he put \$25,000.



Perelli-Minetti: Authorized the bank to loan me \$25,000 to buy grapes, giving the bank warehouse receipts for the wine. I paid on the purchase price only 4 per cent.

My father said to me, "Now you're in a new country, why don't you brothers get all together?" I said, "Father, it will not work. Each one has different ideas. I have ideas, and then we'll have troubles." Anyway, to please my father, I got my two brothers in, Carl and Julius, then formed a corporation which Tribuno joined. Mario Tribuno, Jack's father.

Teiser: What year was this?

Perelli-Minetti: 1908, I think. No, 1907, the end of 1907, because I married in 1908. But unfortunately, they wanted to build a house starting from the top; I wanted to built it from the bottom. They started with big ideas. We were doing very well, but no money and so the end.

Teiser: Were you using the Schmidt property as the basis of it?

Perelli-Minetti: In a way. In San Francisco they rented a big place from Lawrence Scatena, [A.P.] Giannini's stepfather, for \$350 a month, which was big money in those days. And anyway, we stretched too much. Mario Tribuno remained in New York. He was top salesman for the Italian Swiss Colony in New York. Calafonia Malati, another partner, was top salesman in California also for Italian Swiss Colony. All counted on their salaries to operate.

First thing, Italian Swiss Colony fired the three of them.\* So there the wages they were getting from Italian Swiss Colony had to come from the new company which was starting. A.P. Giannini loaned us \$10,000, but that was a drop in the bucket. So we struggled, and Tribuno's father-in-law loaned us also \$10,000, and we struggled and struggled and finally we had to close up. But if I had been by myself, I'd probably be still in Healdsburg. As they say in Italy: not all bad things hurt you. Anyway, we folded up and I left the ranch with just my shirt, and went to Mexico.

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\*Julius Perelli-Minetti, Tribuno and Malati.





Antonio Perelli-Minetti  
Healdsburg, California, 1907



Antonio Perelli-Minetti and  
son Mario, about 1910.



Left to right: Fred Perelli-Minetti, Antonio  
Perelli-Minetti, Antonio Perelli-Minetti, Jr.,  
Conchita Perelli-Minetti Harrison, Mario Perelli-  
Minetti. About 1970.



Teiser: Let me ask a little more about what happened to the wineries in Healdsburg at the time of the 1906 earthquakes. Was the Simi winery damaged?

Perelli-Minetti: No, none of the wineries were damaged in Sonoma County.

Teiser: And not Asti either?

Perelli-Minetti: No.

Teiser: By the time you left the Simi winery was it going well again?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. When I bought the ranch, I still remained with Simi.

Teiser: Oh, you were working with them too?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes, I was operating their winery too. They too paid the bank. Paid the bank back--cleared it up completely.

Teiser: Then did you turn over operation to Fred Haigh finally, or who?

Perelli-Minetti: I turned it to the family. Fred Haigh wasn't married then. In November, when we had to fold up, I immediately went to Mexico.

Teiser: Who continued with the Simi winery? Do you know who handled the operation?

Perelli-Minetti: No, I imagine Isabel.

I understand she lost a daughter. She went to Stanford.

Teiser: Yes, she was a friend of mine. Vivien. As I understand it, Isabel is still running it. Still continuing.\*

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. She's just like her mother. Her mother was paralyzed. They had two wineries in Healdsburg there.

Teiser: The one down on Front Street too?

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\*In May 1970 Mrs. Isabel Haigh sold the winery to Russell H. and Betty Jean Green.



Perelli-Minetti: The one in front of their old house where the family used to live. And Mrs. Simi pretty near killed herself because I closed the winery there.

Teiser: Oh, you closed the one on Front Street?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, because there was no sense, keeping both the wineries.

Teiser: That's a good building out on the highway, isn't it? Was that the one you operated?

Perelli-Minetti: The big one, Montepulciano, the one on the hill. And I replanted the whole vineyard.

Teiser: What grapes were you growing in that area then?

Perelli-Minetti: That's the unfortunate thing of the Prohibition. California had the best wines. The wines that we had in California those days, you couldn't match any place. Why, they made the wines in Europe look like two cents. In Torino in '98, it was not hard to get the Gold Medal for the Italian Swiss Colony. But in Paris, the French wouldn't stand for it. So my father, who spoke fluent French and was one of the judges, insisted that there be a division: European wines, and the other side of the Atlantic. And Italian Swiss Colony got the first Gold Medal there too.

Teiser: Was that for all their wines, or just certain ones?

Perelli-Minetti: All wines were exhibited, yes.

Teiser: Not, for example, the way here, at a State Fair...

Perelli-Minetti: Oh that, that's a joke. Italian Swiss Colony in Asti had those tunnels into the hill, where they kept all the white wines, beautiful wines--aged properly--and also the reds. And those were the ones exhibited.

Teiser: Are they still there?

Perelli-Minetti: The tunnels are there [laughing] Whether the wine is there, I would think not.





Torino, 17 ottobre 1967

Siena, .....

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA  
DELLA VITE E DEL VINO

SIENA

IL PRESIDENTE

Caro Signor Perelli Minetti,

Con molto piacere ho ricevuto la Sua lettera del 10 corr. e subito Le rispondo.

Anzitutto per le interessanti notizie che Ella mi dà sull'impiego della Pigiatrice Sernagiotto (Le dirò che il <sup>nonno</sup>~~nonno~~ dell'invenzione è stato il mio primo Maestro di Viticoltura, e il padre mio compagno di studi alla Scuola Enologica di Alba, dove allora insegnava il padre: anno 1901-1905!).

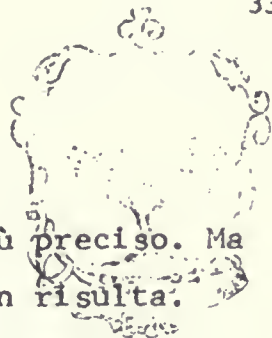
Venendo all'argomento del Primitivo = Zierfandler (non Zinfandel), Le dirò francamente che non sono troppo persuaso di tale identità. Per quanto ne so io, trattasi di vitigni differenti. Il guaio si è che sul Zierfandler non sono d'accordo nemmeno gli ampelografi tedeschi e ungheresi. Chi lo dice sinonimo del Veltliner rosso, chi del Sylvaner rosso... Nessuno però lo dice eguale al Kadarka.

Comunque, non mi pare che si possa affermare che lo Zierfandler non sia che il nostro Primitivo.

Io debbo pensare che questo sia stato importato in California da qualche emigrato pugliese, e che costì qualcuno gli abbia affibbiato il nome di Zierfandler, già costì importato dall'Ungheria da quel certo Colonnello. Non sarebbe certo il primo caso!

Ma in materia d'ampelografia, specialmente dove, come in California, si sono importati vitigni da ogni Paese, c'è da perdere la testa!





Mi spiace di non poterle dire nulla di più preciso. Ma dalla letteratura ampelografica tale omonimia non risulta.

✱ Voglia intanto gradire i miei più cordiali saluti;

Suo

(G. Dalmasso)



## AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN GRAPE VARIETIES

Perelli-Minetti: What happened during Prohibition, all the delicate grapes that made the best wine would not ship, so the grower who had those varieties was forced to pull them out and plant prunes or something else--Alicante Bouschet and other tough-skinned grapes that would ship, and some Zinfandel that would ship--some Carignane and some Zinfandel that would stand the transportation to New York and Chicago. Those were the varieties grown, and the grower who had inferior grapes made money. The ones that had the best varieties had to pull them out.

Teiser: What varieties were you growing in Healdsburg before, then?

Perelli-Minetti: In the black grapes, first of all, was the Zinfandel, that was the number one in acreage. We had Petite Sirah, Carignane, and some Mataro, and that's practically all of the black grapes. In the white, Burger, which was the cheapest grape. Now it's a high priced grape. Its wine was called Hock, that the Germans bought.

Teiser: We don't make that in California any more do we, or we don't call it that?

Perelli-Minetti: No. Now it's called chablis. Sauvignon grapes, different Sauvignons, and Rieslings and a number of other white varieties were planted, and made beautiful white wines. So all those grapes wouldn't ship.

And speaking of grapes, I went to Italy two years ago, and Brindisi and all that country there has Zinfandel. They call it Primitivo. So I wrote to Professor [G.] Dalmasso, head of the Academy of the Wine and Viticulture of Italy, asking what was the original name of Primitivo, because some books I have found mentioned "Zierfandler." I imagined that was reduced to "Zinfandel" in California. But the Primitivo (Zinfandel) of Italy goes back before the Zinfandel came over here. Professor Dalmasso said they can't find any records, and probably it was brought to California from Italy, because the Primitivo there is an old wine, before viticulture started in California, and some Italian immigrants could have brought the cuttings, as is customary by many.



Perelli-Minetti: Here is the letter from Professor Dalmasso.\* He said this: [translating] "Coming back to the Primitivo, Zierfandler (not Zinfandel), I'll be frank that I am not very satisfied with such identity for what I believe are different vines. The trouble is that on the Zierfandler I am not in harmony with the German and Hungarian ampelographers. Probably it is synonymous of a Veltliner red or Sylvaner red. Not everyone considers it equal to the Kadarkas." (I don't know what that is.) "Be as it may, it does not appear that the Zierfandler is our Primitivo.

"I would think that the importation to California must have been by some Italian that emigrated there, and that the name has been changed from that imported from Hungary by the colonials. But in matters of ampelography, especially where, like in California, wines from all countries have been imported, it is simply a headache! Sorry I cannot be more precise, but from reading the ampelographic description it does not appear to be the same."

As a matter of fact, the Zinfandel here and the Zinfandel there which in Italy is called Primitivo, it's the same vine. I'm trying to import some from over there for this reason: that the Zinfandel here will not stand the climate from Livingston down. The first crop just rots. Now in Italy, in the boot of Italy, 30 per cent of the vines are Zinfandel. That means several hundred thousand tons. It's quite a large quantity. It produces well and does not rot. It could have acquired a resistance that if maintained here would be very valuable.

Teiser: Your daughter\*\* mentioned that you were a member of the Accademia Italiana delle Vite e del Vino, Siena, the academy of which Professor Dalmasso was president when he wrote you. You were elected to that?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, I found my name on their list. I don't know how I got there.

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\*The letter, from Giovanni Dalmasso of the Accademia Italiana delle Vite e del Vino, Siena, is dated Torino, 17 October, 1967.

\*\*Jean Perelli-Minetti



Teiser: Your daughter was saying that there are very few outside of academic people in it. Is that right?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, [Joseph] Di Giorgio was one.

Now whether [Agoston] Haraszthy brought the Zinfandel from Italy, or brought it from Hungary, or where the Italian came from we don't know. In 1926 I spent one month in Hungary but could find out nothing about Zinfandel.

One day I told Mr. Joseph Di Giorgio about a grape vine whose fruit matured in May. He was very much interested in it. The owner had two vines in front of his house, but he would not sell the cuttings, and threatened to kill anyone trying to steal them. So Mr. Di Giorgio said, "Tony, if you go to Europe, can you find the vine?" I said, "Sure, I can find the vine."

Teiser: Where was it that these two vines were?

Perelli-Minetti: Right across from our house, in Delano.

So I went to Italy. I left here on the 26th of June 1926 for Paris. I figured from the vine more or less the family that it would belong to. And from Paris I went to Alba, because the professor of viticulture I had in Conegliano, Professor Sannino, was teaching there. I talked to him, and he said evidently it must belong to the family of the Chasselas, the one that I figured out. He said, "You're very lucky because the agricultural commission of Hungary was here last week, so I'll give you a letter of introduction to the head of the commission in Budapest. You can see him, because the Chasselas are the predominating vines of Hungary and some place in Africa. But I think in Hungary probably you will find it better."

So I went to Hungary, and I got in touch with the Baron de Barosch. He was secretary of the commission. Mrs. Mabel Willebrandt secured for me from Washington a letter that made me practically an envoy of the American Department of Agriculture. In Hungary, I saw the vice president, the minister of the treasury, and the minister of agriculture. Hungary was very poor then, at least after the war, as you know. With the manager of the commission, and the minister of agriculture, we left Budapest at six in the morning, and



Perelli-Minetti: by 10 a.m. reached a town with a Magyar name that I couldn't pronounce. When we arrived at the station, we were met by a couple of automobiles and taken to a home, beautiful house, in this little town. There we were served lunch, beautiful lunch. There were, I remember, four beautiful Hungarian girls in typical dress to serve at the table. After lunch, we went in a narrow cart with two wicker seats facing each other, drawn by two mules, one in the track, one on the outside, the driver standing, and one fellow on foot trotting alongside of the mules for several miles. We arrived at the estate, and there wasn't a grape on the vine at all. They had all dropped. Colure.

Teiser: What?

Perelli-Minetti: Colure. When the berry doesn't fertilize, due to cold ground mostly. Some blame rain, but it wasn't due to the rain only, because I could explain that in Ukiah during flowering it rained for over a month steadily and fecundation took place under the cap.

We went through the vineyard and then came to a spot which was sandy. The vines had grapes. So I explained to them, "You have no drainage. You have no air in the soil." It was very compact. "The roots breathe like anybody else, and unless you have air in the soil--"

I made a sketch of a drainage. As it drains it draws in air, which is its principal function. Some people think it is the water that it takes out of the ground, but it isn't; it's the air that it pulls in.

I was anxious to see the winery and the winemaker, and talk about the varieties there. I asked, "Now we go to the winery; it is on top of the hill?" Tremendous hill covered with several hundred acres of vineyards. Then we came to a point, there was a cut in the hill and there was a big door, and the cellar was carved all in the hill. Oh, they had a tremendous amount of wine, all white wine. Beautiful wines. And so they explained to me that it was made from two varieties, one Tutti Frutti, the other Pearl of Csaba (pronounced choba), both Chasselas family. So I got a carload of Pearl of Csaba and Tutti Frutti and planted them part on our place and part on Di Giorgio's at Arvin. We split the load.



Perelli-Minetti: We got the first crop. I was so proud. I filled a box of the grapes which I was going to take right to [A.P.] Giannini in San Francisco. Fortunately, when I got to the bank, I looked at the grapes. They had turned brown; the contact bruised them and turned them brown. So Mr. A.P. Giannini never saw the grapes. Because I was going to make a point on a big loan from him. That gave me cold feet and I didn't. We planted those vines and then we had to take them out. Didn't result economically.

Teiser: And you couldn't tell if it was the same stock?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, they were the same grapes, the Pearl of Csaba. This fellow with the Pearl of Csaba had a little vineyard in Arkansas, and when he came to California, he brought the cuttings with him.

In Hungary I couldn't find any Zinfandel. I looked all over, but I couldn't find any. And there is no Zinfandel there, so I was told at this winery. So the question now arises whether Zinfandel comes from Italy or comes from Hungary, or comes from where? The question is that there's more Zinfandel in Italy than California ever had planted. Even at the highest point.

Teiser: But they don't know where Italy's came from?

Perelli-Minetti: No, because Dr. Dalmasso, head of the academy, could not tell me. He has published many books. He published one book, three volumes, I gave it to [Lewis S.] Rosenstiel as a present. Most beautiful book that you have ever seen. It starts back a million years ago, and tells step by step, the history of the grape, with illustrations and correlated pictures. You see the grape in all the monuments in Europe and the world.

Teiser: When they replanted some of the vineyards in Europe after the phylloxera here, do you think any cuttings could have been taken to Italy?

Perelli-Minetti: The phylloxera started in Europe when the Count of Klostenberg, a lieutenant in an Austrian torpedo boat, came to the Hudson. He was a collector of vines, and he saw these beautiful vines on the Hudson River banks, and took cuttings to Europe that brought the phylloxera too, that spread all over Europe, destroying all vineyards. On those vines, the phylloxera was visible on the leaves.



Teiser: They finally grafted European vines on American stocks?

Perelli-Minetti: The theory in Europe was that if those vines had resistance to phylloxera, grafting was the answer. Then came crossing, which produced hybrids. Zinfandel in Southern Italy antedates the phylloxera.

In Europe, as a rule, even now they stick to the varieties they have cultivated for generations. In Europe, during the centuries of grape planting, time has indicated the best variety for the locality, and they stick to it.

In California we don't do that. We plant Zinfandel in Ukiah, we plant Zinfandel in Southern California, we plant Zinfandel through the central valley. We don't give a darn for quality, whether it's good or not.

#### EXPERIMENTAL PLANTINGS

Perelli-Minetti: [Showing a paper] These are the plots on the big ranch that we sold to Lanza.\* See, all these are different varieties. This is the collection of Italian varieties. Tried every one of them, trying to find something that was adapted to this part to make the wine comparable to the northern type of wine. That is my object.

Teiser: This says "Collection of vines from Barletta, Italy." You sent there for those?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Now this Hungarian collection, Mattias collection-- Mattias was the Burbank of Hungary. He died and left his collection to the state. The minister of agriculture allowed me the varieties; there were some ninety.

Teiser: What about the twenty?

Perelli-Minetti: That's the number of cuttings I got from each variety.

Teiser: This was in 1926?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, 1926. So here shows all the experiments... [Turning pages]

Teiser: 1930...

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\*Horace O. Lanza



Perelli-Minetti: All the results, the changes... [turning pages]. That was when I was with California Grape Products, Tribuno.

Teiser: [Reading] Mario P. Tribuno, A. Perelli-Minetti, and Victor Repetto was secretary. That's a nice letterhead. Good pictures of your plants.

Perelli-Minetti: Now this is the complete collection of Portuguese vines.

Teiser: In 1942?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Dr. [H.P.] Olmo called me on the phone--this was just when the war started--and said to me, "Tony, I've got these varieties here and I know you'll like them, and I have no place to plant them. Would you plant them in your vineyard?"\*

I said, "Send them down." I still have all these varieties.

Teiser: They all worked?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, I planted Tinto cão, Tinta amarella. I planted commercially all the varieties that were best in Portugal. And some growers think that they brought them, but they didn't. We grafted all those cuttings from Portugal in front of my house. They're still there.

Teiser: Just experimental plantings?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. Some rows have two varieties, some, one for the whole row.

Teiser: You're not using any of these commercially now?

Perelli-Minetti: No, we tried them commercially and we had to take them out.

Teiser: When you try a new grape commercially, how much do you have to plant of it in order to give it a real test?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, one vine is enough.

Teiser: And you can find out in the lab from that?

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\*See also p. 141.



Perelli-Minetti: As for the wine, yes. But if the vine is from seed you have to find out in the field. You know, unfortunately, you have to wait about five to six years to make sure that there's no throwback. And many of the varieties which we planted, that were developed here on the place, varieties that we thought were beautiful--then within the fourth or fifth year they started to throw back and completely went back to what parents it had in the making of that variety.

Teiser: Have you developed some successfully, however?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, we have. We have about 350 acres now.

Teiser: Of your own varieties?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. The way I do it, I go right through the vineyard every day when the grapes are maturing, and if you pay attention you find in some bunches a berry or two different from the others, or you find one berry that's outstanding, a white berry on a black grape. I pick that berry, and I plant those seeds. Then as soon as feasible I graft it on an old vine, and then the next year I get some crop. Well, I've been doing that for thirty-five years here on the place. And that's how I get our vines. If you cross-breed by pollinization, what have you? You take the varieties that are known already--I want to get away from those. Get some variety that comes from nature and that has proven safe from throwback. And the throwback could happen also in the one that you do by pollinization. It's a slow process. Each grower has a chance to improve his vineyard if forced by economical reasons, which is the most incentive thing that you've got.

Now in California we don't do that. We pay no attention to where the grapes come, how the grapes have been pruned, how the grapes have been cultivated. In Europe, you do. If you plant a little tobacco among the vines to fertilize your crop, you don't sell it at a good price and the grower stops doing it. Over here he can put anything he wants, as long as he gets a big crop, because he sells it at the same price. Now the soil between here and Fresno is so different that it would make a different wine, but such finesse is not to be considered at this time, which will come in time when we have a public that knows what it's buying, quality. The public today buys the label, doesn't give a damn what's inside the bottle because it does not



Perelli-Minetti: know the difference. And we sell the label, and that's an unfortunate thing. Before Prohibition, people bought quality. The label had a relative meaning because they bought the wine for its quality, and knew it.

#### LAST PRE-PROHIBITION AND FIRST POST-REPEAL ENTERPRISES

Teiser: Were there any varieties which you grew before Prohibition in the Healdsburg area which are no longer grown at all?

Perelli-Minetti: I could not say positively; very likely Mataro is gone, also the Petite Sirahs.

Teiser: Did you have much land with the Schmidt property?

Perelli-Minetti: We had the 700 acres and then we bought another 50 acres, and we planted about 70 additional acres. We bought resistant vines through Georges de Latour, who was selling resistant, grafted vines. We got a bad deal because the callusness was fresh of that same year, and we lost a large amount of money, as the vines after planting broke off at the graft.

Teiser: You had everything go wrong!

Perelli-Minetti: Not wrong, but conditions against our control. A heavy frost on the 28, 29 and 30 of May wiped out the crop. Not a berry was left, and too late for a second crop. And maybe that was a stimulus.

When the company closed, the day Bill [Perelli-Minetti] was born, I left for Mexico. All I had was \$80 in my pocket. In three years in association with Don Miguel Cardenas, ex-governor of Coahuila, I had the largest vineyard in the republic--over 800 acres. Then the revolution started. I fought to preserve the vineyard but had to give up. I returned to California and started with Tribuno,\* built the Ukiah plant and was doing extremely well when--bang! Prohibition!

After Prohibition was repealed, I was going to build a little winery. Mr. George Wallace came to me, "Well, I'm a rich man, I've large vineyards"--he had 600 acres--"Why don't we put the winery on my place?" And I said,

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\*Domenico Tribuno. See p. 56.



Perelli-Minetti: "All right, I'll join; we'll go 50-50, in the equipment." Knowles, who represented Redwood Industrial California Corporation of San Francisco, wanted to sell us the cooperage. I said to Mr. Knowles, "I need a half a million gallons of cooperage. I have no money, not a dime, but I'll pay you as we sell the wine." And Mr. Wallace said, "I'll do the same." Mr. Knowles answered he could not make a sale on those terms but had to consult the company.

"If they say all right, well, you have the cooperage; if they say no, you don't have the cooperage."

I said, "All right, very well." So this was a Friday. He said, "I'll come back next Wednesday." The following Wednesday, he came back. Mr. Wallace came up from Los Angeles. He was supposed to be a millionaire. He had made money in the cracking of gasoline, or something, of an invention.

"Well, Mr. Knowles, what's the verdict?" Mr. Knowles said, "We have gone through your record Mr. Perelli-Minetti, and the company feels that you're entitled, because when you lost the property in Healdsburg, not one of your people took anything away. It was a legitimate loss, for lack of capital. So you have the half million gallons cooperage, and you pay when you sell the wine. Mr. Wallace, you pay cash."

Mr. Wallace said, "Why? I'm a rich man."

"The more reason you pay cash," replied Mr. Knowles.

Then I jumped in. I said, "How about me taking the whole million gallons?" He said, "Yes, you can have the million gallons." So all the cooperage belonged to me. Wallace had the building, I had the cooperage. But we split it half and half, and he paid me. I paid the company for the cooperage from the sale of the wine. We made money there.\*

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\*This winery, then called the Wallace Winery, was later owned by Delano Growers Cooperative. See also p. 64.



## MEXICO, 1910-1917

Teiser: After you had closed the business up so neatly in Healdsburg earlier, you went to Mexico. How did you happen to decide to go to Mexico?

Perelli-Minetti: In 1902 Evanisto Madero, the father of Francisco I. Madero, came to Asti. I remember he put his arm around my shoulder, and he said, "You come with me to Mexico. You'll make a fortune there." He said, "Why stay here for \$75 a month?" (He asked me what I was making.) He said, "We have a big wine business; you come to Parras." That's the town where the Madero family lived, and lives. That was the first winery built on the American continent. A room the size of this.

Teiser: Twenty by twenty?

Perelli-Minetti: I don't think it was even twenty by twenty. That was the Marques de Aguayo built the winery back in the 1670's, something like that time, by concession of the King of Spain. Later, when we had the winery at Healdsburg, the Schmidt winery, a Mr. Arredondo Cepeda of Cuatro Cienegas, who was the biggest vineyardist in Mexico in those days, asked me if we could have the son Jesus come there on the weekends (he went to UC School of Agriculture) and practice on our place. I said, "Sure."

Later Mr. Arredondo Cepeda came to visit us. In those days we bought grapes for \$8 a ton. He said, "You're crazy to stay here. We're selling grapes for 250 pesos a ton, which is \$125. Why don't you come to Mexico? Why don't you come to Mexico?"

It was 1909 when the son came up. I said to myself, "Well, I've a connection there." And in 1910 when I got to Torreón, Mexico, I was met by Mr. Traverso, a young man, who took me to Mr. Juan Castillon, who represented the ex-governor of the state, who had an immense hacienda there. It was Traverso who had sent Mr. Cepeda to see me. He was managing for Don Juan Castillon a grape ranch of 50 hectares.

The next day Don Juan Castillon invited me to his house where I met a young man, Jose de Bano, a viticulturist out of a school of Hungary, whose father was the Hungarian ambassador in Mexico. He had a list of haciendas given



Perelli-Minetti: to him by Don Porfirio Diaz to foment viticulture in Mexico. As I was invited by Don Arredondo Cepeda, I went to Cuatro Cienegas. I remember there Mr. Ferrigno had a big mercantile store across from Mr. Cepeda's house, and in the evening we sat out on the sidewalk (Mexican custom), as I was a guest of Mr. Cepeda, and Italian like Mr. Ferrigno.

There was a fellow wrapped up in a serape up to his nose, smoking cigarettes; puffs out, and then covers himself. That was the first four days I was in Mexico, and I couldn't speak Spanish--just a few words. He insisted on talking to me in Spanish. Then he got up and he said, "Well, it's ten o'clock, I'm going to go to bed." Then he spoke to me in beautiful English. "Tomorrow morning you'll have breakfast with me?" I said, "Yes, thank you."

Teiser: He had been educated in Boston, you said?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, at Tufts College. He was Mr. Felipe F. Cárdenas. He told me that when he was in the second year, he used to teach mathematics to the first year students. And so he invited me to the hacienda in Ocampo. His brother had five million acres of land. We went on horseback all the time for 15 days. Five million acres. Then the revolution started, and Don Felipe had to get out.

Teiser: How long were you there?

Perelli-Minetti: In Ocampo?

Teiser: Yes.

Perelli-Minetti: I believe three or four months. Oh, yes, this was the prelude to get back in the wine industry. Mr. Felipe Cárdenas, who was the brother of Miguel Cárdenas, ex-governor, had to leave because the revolution got pretty dangerous for him. He was supposed to come back in a month. Told me to take charge of things.

Teiser: Was there a winery?

Perelli-Minetti: No, a big cattle ranch.

Before he left, he gave me a pretty tough call-down, and I didn't like that, but did not quit. I took it because he was leaving. It would have been a stupid thing



Perelli-Minetti: for me to quit, would be like holding up somebody. So I waited till he came back. Several months later he returned. I told him I was leaving. He said, "Before you leave, let me give you a letter for my brother. You go and see my brother in Saltillo; he was the ex-governor. So I went there, and he told me he had a big hacienda in Torreon and it was all in cotton and, if I wanted, to go there and plant grapes. I said, "Well, I'm going to Mexico City to see somebody else, a man by the name of Vertiz." But when I got to Mexico City, Don Porfirio\* tried to grab him because he was heading the revolution party, and he ran just before they grabbed him. Mexico was a police state in those days. So I had to come back to it.

On the way to Mexico City, in San Luis Potosí, a gentleman got on the train, very portly, aristocratic looking, sat across from me and point-blank asked me what I was doing in Mexico, what were my aims--in English. I told him. He told me that the wine business was a good business, and that they had good laws. I said, "You may have good laws, but, nobody respects them, in the wine, and you cannot develop a good legitimate business where frauds are going on openly." So when we got to Mexico City, while entering the station, he takes out a visiting card: Jesus Monjervas, Minister of Agriculture. I pretty near fainted. He said, "Tomorrow morning I expect you to see me at ten o'clock at my office and go over the wine laws." I went over the wine laws, same laws of Italy; they were copied from those of France and Italy. Mexico has good laws, but they are not enforced, so everybody does what they want. Even today the law means nothing.

I went back to Saltillo and made a deal with Governor Cárdenas. In 1912 I went to Fresno and from William Kirkman I bought a carload of vines and a carload of fruit trees. And I followed the cars on another train into Mexico. When the two cars arrived in Nonclova, the news came in that they had killed President Madero.\*\* I said to myself, "Well, there is a new trouble." I hired an engine and took the cars into Torreon. That was the last

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\*Porfirio Diaz

\*\*He was shot on February 22, 1913.



Perelli-Minetti: freight train that ever got into Torreon for many years, because of Villa and the revolution. I planted 700 acres of vines.

Teiser: What types of vines were those?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, Zinfandel and Petite Sirah and Carignane, the best vines Kirkman had. Also some table grapes, Muscat and Emperor, Thompson. But then the revolution started full blast, and I finally couldn't do any more, couldn't do anything. I started laying the foundation for the winery. Had a program to sell the wine, patterned on Standard Oil Company; open a place first in Monterrey, and keep expanding. A barrel house type, where people could come in and have their jugs filled. But the revolution--everything went to pieces. And then Pancho Villa--I knew him quite well. I used to have breakfast with him every morning.

Teiser: Where?

Perelli-Minetti: In Torreon. Because, when [George] Carothers was assigned as special envoy of the United States to Pancho Villa, he was the consul in Torreon. The consul that followed was a fellow by the name of Barrett, head of the American Bank in Torreon. He got cold feet and he quickly left for the states, so the American consulate was left without representation and all the Americans left in a hurry. Five of us took over the consulate and named Isaac Hulmer the head, and the other four as helpers. And I was named liaison officer because of my Spanish and the fact that I was Italian. Villa hated the Americans, and I could get anything because to him I was still an Italian. I spoke Spanish fluently.

Teiser: Were you actually an American citizen by then?

Perelli-Minetti: The consulate issued me a citizenship paper. I had only the first papers, but then a paper is not the heart. And I remember one case in particular. General Scott\* was supposed to give the ammunition to Villa. Villa had been assured of the ammunition, which they didn't give him; they betrayed him. This was before the time of the invasion of Villa into Columbus.

We, from the consulate, advised Washington seven days before Villa entered into Columbus that Villa was going to go into Columbus. They withdrew the forces from Columbus,

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\*General Winfield Scott



Perelli-Minetti: so Villa entered there and killed 15 or 16 Americans. That created what was wanted, and Pershing went after Villa and the navy took Vera Cruz. The intention was to go all the way to Panama, but things worked out different. We joined the war in '14 or '15 I think, and that stopped. The U.S.A. withdrew from Veracruz, and withdrew from...

You may remember the Panama Canal was opened in 1914. At that time, England had a big navy in the Caribbean. Our Congress passed a law that our ships could go through the canal without paying. England said, "No." We didn't have any navy to speak of in those days. We were just a small country. We went to war with England in Mexico. Madero was put in by the United States on condition that he would get the English out. Huerta came in against Madero to keep the English in. So it went back and forth 'til we finally won out, and the English, which operated under the name of Pierson and Company, had all the oil lands and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was owned practically by England. We couldn't fight the English navy, but we fought the English on the land in Mexico. That was actually the basis of the revolution in Mexico. The U.S.A. had sent a man down there by the name of Turner, who wrote all the books, to excite the American people. That's actually the history of the revolution in Mexico, the beginning.

Teiser: I interviewed John Turner's widow, Mrs. Ethel Duffy Turner.\* What did you think of Turner's reporting?

Perelli-Minetti: I thought it was factual; there is no question about that, those conditions! And that's the reason why my father didn't want me to go to Mexico.

Teiser: But you saw the conditions that he wrote of?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes, there was no question about that. Those were the conditions. Now if you were on top, you loved it. But if you were--like a Spaniard told me, "You landed here on your feet." Because I was already in with big people. He said, "We landed on our head and then we had to turn around and do the best we could."

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\*Ethel Duffy Turner, Writers and Revolutionists, Regional Oral History Office, 1967.

...with some ... and killed 17 or 18 Americans ...  
... was wanted, and ... went after ...  
... and the navy took ... The intention was ...  
... all the way to ... but this ...  
... the war in ... I think ...  
... withdrew from ... and withdrew from ...

You may remember the ... was ... in ...  
... that time, England had a big navy in the ...  
... Congress passed a law that our ships could go ...  
... without ... England ...  
... to go ... of ... days ...  
... We went to ... in ...  
... by the United States ...  
... the ... out ...  
... to keep the English in ...  
... finally was out, and the English ...  
... of ... and Company, had all the oil ...  
... of Tehuacan was owned ...  
... the English ... the English navy, but we ...  
... the English on the land in Mexico. That was ...  
... the ... in Mexico. The ... had ...  
... the name of Turner, who was ...  
... the American people. That's ...  
... the revolution in Mexico, the beginning.

... Turner's widow, Mrs. ...  
... of Turner's ...  
... there is no question about that,  
... And that's the reason why my father  
... to go to Mexico.

... the conditions that he wrote off?  
... was no question about that. There ...  
... if you want to see, you ...  
... told me, "Don't ...  
... I was ...  
... and ...  
... we could ...

... Turner, ...  
... 1901.

(Interview #2 - May 16, 1969)

INTERVAL IN TULARE COUNTY, 1914

Perelli-Minetti: You remember I was talking to you about the error made in planting the same variety of vines all over California? Here is an example: In 1914, the situation in Mexico (I was in Torreon) got very bad, so I had to come up here. And I met Frank Giannini of Tulare. He was an old-timer in the wine business. He said, "Tony, do you know of anybody that could make wine for me?" Well, I don't know when I could get back to Mexico, and this was just about the time the vintage started. Naturally, money was very scarce. I had a wife and three children then. So I said to Frank, "I know a winemaker."

"He's a good one?"

"I think so."

He said, "They all tell me they're good. They all make vinegar for me."

"Well, I don't think I'll make vinegar for you."

"Yes, I'm going to do it."

So we agreed for one cent a gallon. Then he said, "Well, suppose you make vinegar?" I said, "How much money you want for me to deposit in the bank as a guarantee?" I didn't have a dime.

He said, "Oh no, that's all right. If you feel like that, I'll take your word for it."



Perelli-Minetti: I made the wine. And I made a dry wine containing 18 1/2 per cent alcohol, natural fermentation. That's what he wanted me to make, dry wine. Mr. Beccuti, Croce-Beccuti,\* who had good wine sales, came in from Livermore and bought the wine. The price of wine then was 11¢ a gallon. Beccuti paid 19¢ a gallon for that wine. So Giannini got excited and said, "I'm going to Fowler and buy 2,000 tons of Zinfandel grapes." I said, "Look here, Frank, these grapes are one thing. What the grapes from Fowler are, I don't know." "Oh," he says, "we can always make sweet wine out of them."

"On that condition, all right."

So the first carload came in. We crushed them. No matter what I did, all the scientific help I could give to help the yeast, was of no avail. We didn't have much of a laboratory, just alcohol analysis. So I made port and brandy.

It was agreed for one cent a gallon. When the season was over, Frank Giannini said to me, "Now I can buy a big ranch." (It today is worth millions of dollars because it was across from the Mooney Park there on the way to Visalia.) He said, "I can buy that ranch for \$14,000, and I'll finance you and you make the wine for me, and with the proceeds of the wine making pay for the ranch. That way I secure a winemaker, and whatever you get from me is more than enough to pay." I said, "No thanks. I'm in Mexico and I'm staying down there. I am sorry." That proves to you the difference in the grapes that Frank Giannini had on his ranch that could make beautiful dry wine and those from Fowler of the same varieties.

Teiser: Where was that?

Perelli-Minetti: In Tulare, next to the winery.

Teiser: What part of Tulare?

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\*The 1911 San Francisco directory lists the Piemont Winery of Giuseppe Croce and Joseph Beccuti.



Perelli-Minetti: On the way to Visalia. It's about three miles north of Tulare. After Repeal Petri bought the winery; later Petri sold it to Arakelian. Then Arakelian\* sold it to this other group. Now it's for sale again.

Teiser: Who last owned it?

Perelli-Minetti: Kirkorian,\*\* I think. It shows to you what you can do with the soil. Now that soil was appropriate for those grapes and produced beautiful wine, 18 1/2 to 19 per cent alcohol, natural fermentation. The well water at the winery had a temperature of only 54°. It permitted us to control fermentation.

That conclusively shows the difference between the same variety of grapes grown in a different location.

It is a common practice to refrigerate wine during fermentation to prevent high temperature, and the average winemaker operates on the effect (rise of temperature) rather than on the cause that makes the temperature of fermentation go up: transformation of sugar into alcohol, etcetera, by the yeast.

Now the yeast is very sensitive to temperature, even a five degree difference. In Tulare the well water was 54° Fahr. I had 100 feet of coil in the 5,000 gallon fermenters, and I used a tiny flow of water to maintain the temperature under 70°. (The grapes were coming in at 100° to 105° Fahr.)

You must realize that the juice boils like water in a kettle, and that the yeast multiplies by the billions, and the temperature of the must increases as rapidly as the yeast multiplies. Now, as it comes in contact with the coils, where the temperature is below that of the must, the yeast becomes, so as to say, paralyzed, and drops, thus stopping momentarily the process of changing sugar into alcohol, which produces roughly three and a half degrees of heat per point of sugar.

In those days temperatures were higher. The grapes would come in at 100°-115°, and we had no trouble in controlling the fermentation and maintaining it at a given degree by the amount of water I would circulate in pipes about 100 feet.

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\*K. Arakelian

\*\*Berge Kirkorian



## REMARKS ON WEATHER CHANGES

Perelli-Minetti: The weather has changed. For instance, before the earthquake, in Healdsburg, it would snow in the valley; some four or five inches would fall. That does not happen any more now. The summer was as hot as it is here in the valley. In those days before the 1906 earthquake, the city dammed the Russian River just by the railroad bridge, producing in the middle of the river a big lake. A dancing platform was built where all the young people went dancing and the families would be in launches all around it. So we were dancing up there and the families just were looking. And we'd be in shirtsleeves 'til two o'clock in the morning. And warm. Because the nights were warmer then.

On Saturday nights the farmers would come in town and tie the rigs at the plaza railing. They would shop and then about eleven o'clock go down to the river, and after the dance would start back home, maybe take six, seven hours to get back. They came from Alexander Valley, from Dry Creek, from many places around, most in wagons. And to make eight, ten miles or fifteen miles was quite a long way.

Then the earthquake came. You couldn't sit in the plaza in Healdsburg with an overcoat, it was so cold. The fog--you couldn't see yourself from here to over there! Before you could go any place, to San Francisco, to Eureka, and you'd seldom see a speck of fog in the winter. Now it's so foggy that it kills. And I remember well, I think it was a Norwegian ship, was coming into San Francisco and landed about 18 miles south of San Francisco and went aground there because they were sailing by instruments.

Teiser: The weather changed...

Perelli-Minetti: And it has been changing right along. I remember in 1914, I asked Mr. Frank Giannini, "Where is Tulare Lake?" He said, "It's over there," said I should go and see it. "All right, I'll get me a horse." And I went horseback and I travelled all day, couldn't find the lake. So when I came back, he laughed and said, "Well, I got one on you this time." I said, "I've been looking all over. Where is the lake?" He said, "There used to be a lake. When I came here there was a hull of a ship still there. They used to go from Alpaugh, which is four miles away from here, by water to San Francisco. From here they would go to Los Banos,



Perelli-Minetti: then by the San Joaquin River and through the Sacramento River into San Francisco. Did you know that? Then that later dried up."

And the temperature in those days would get up to about 114°. We have had at Delano a temperature of 120°. I think one time it was a little higher than that. At night the vines would smell like fire had gone through, just burning, and the leaves would curl up. When I first came here.

#### BACKGROUND OF DELANO ENTERPRISES

Perelli-Minetti: I came here in 1922, but I started the vineyard in 1924. And the reason I came to Delano was one of those things that happen in life. Mr. Mario Tribuno was going to Europe, and on the boat was Mr. Di Giorgio. They knew of each other but had never met.\*

Teiser: This Mr. Tribuno is the father of...

Perelli-Minetti: Of John. He was the godfather of my oldest son Mario,\*\* who is an attorney, graduated from Stanford University. Five of my children graduated from Stanford, all born in California, while Conchita was born in Mexico. Jean, the youngest girl, graduated in law from Cornell. Fred (we call him "BZ") joined the air force and service, stationed in England.

He was then seventeen. He wanted to join the army, but his mother refused to give the consent. One day, I met him casually in San Francisco. It surprised me, as I thought him in school, and I asked him what he was doing in San Francisco. He said, "I'm going to get registered and go to war." I said, "Does your mother know?" He said, "No,

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\*For a continuation of this account, see p. 54.

\*\*Mario Perelli-Minetti is vice president and general manager of the California Wine Association.



Perelli-Minetti: but nobody can say no now because I'm of age, 18." So he went in. And we got a report, a telegram from Washington he had been killed in action. He was a bomber plane navigator of a B-29. But he wasn't killed, he had his skull split. He was a month or so in the hospital. He was unconscious a long time. Funny part of life. The nurse who was taking care of him, an old Irish-woman, said to BZ, "I have 160 acres in Delano, in your town. How much is it worth?" He said, "I don't know anything about that. Write to my father." And she wrote to me that some Frenchman offered her \$15 an acre. Before I answered the letter I consulted Mr. Billings at the California Bank. "Lawrence," I said, "this woman is taking care of my son," and I showed him the letter, "How much is that land worth?"

"Today that land is worth \$50 an acre." So I told the Frenchman, "You want the land?" He said, "Yes."

"It'll cost you \$50 an acre."

"Oh," he said, "I won't pay that."

"All right, if you don't want to pay" (it was Tuesday), "you have until Thursday morning at 12 o'clock. If you are not here at the bank to pay, the land will be sold." I would have bought it if he refused because, you know, the way she took care of my son, I couldn't let her sell the land for \$15 an acre. And he looked at me, "You old son of a bitch!" I said, "Don't mind. You pay the \$50 and I will forget about that." So he paid the \$50. The woman was paid \$8,000 for the land. She wrote me a nice letter thanking me for what I had done for her. If I had bought the land, I might have been criticized, you know, but I didn't so...

Teiser: I think I interrupted you as you were speaking of Mr. Tribuno and Mr. Di Giorgio meeting.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, they met on that steamer and Di Giorgio said, "I should like to have a winery down on our place. Why don't you put the winery in Delano? Or in Arvin?" Mr. Tribuno said, "I don't know anything about that. You see Tony when you get back to California, whatever you and he do is all right with me." I was in Pacific Grove with the family when Di Giorgio (whom I did not know then) phoned he wanted to see me. (In the meantime I had received a



Perelli-Minetti: letter from Tribuno.) I said, "Well, I can meet you in Ukiah."

"Fine, because I'll have to go to Ukiah Saturday."

"Well, we'll meet in Ukiah then."

There we pulled out some grape boxes to sit on. Young Tribuno (that's Mario Tribuno's younger brother Domenico) was there too. After going over the matter of a winery in Delano or Arvin, Di Giorgio said, "Why don't you come down and see Delano?" This was in August. I said, "All right, you make the date, and I'll meet you there."

"Well, Labor Day we're going to go down to Arvin, so we'll meet in Bakersfield on that day."

It was so hot, my God, you can't believe it. Mr. Di Giorgio, that is Joseph Di Giorgio, was telling me how much better Arvin was, but as I checked on the soil of Delano and Arvin and looked at grapes in both places, I said to myself, "What made me go to Ukiah?" I told Mr. Di Giorgio that I would only put a winery in Delano, because we were in the wine business and Delano soil would produce better grapes by far.

But I'll tell you the story why we went to Ukiah. Because we made money in Ukiah.

#### CALIFORNIA GRAPE PRODUCTS IN UKIAH AND DELANO

Teiser: That's going back a little isn't it? Did you go to Ukiah just after you returned from Mexico?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: What year did you return from Mexico?

Perelli-Minetti: January 1, 1917. You want that story now?

Teiser: Yes.

Perelli-Minetti: As I was going to the hotel between trains in San Francisco (my wife and children were living with her parents in



Perelli-Minetti: Healdsburg), I met young Tribuno, Domenico. He said, "When did you get here?"

"Just now."

"I'm glad to see you. I need a man to help me."

"What is involved?"

"I'm buying wine for my brothers and I cannot do it alone. I need somebody else to help me."

"Well, we'll split the profit, whatever we make;" thus we joined hands.

We called on Louis Pagani in Glen Ellen to buy some wine. He brought out a beautiful glass of wine. But as he opened the door of the winery, the smell of vinegar would knock anybody down.

I said, "Louis, we can't afford to buy your wine because, you know--it is a beautiful wine, but you would put some of your vinegar in each barrel and spoil it. But tell you what we will do: we will buy the vinegar." He said, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "We are going to make wine out of it."

"In that case I want to come in as partner."

"All right. You put up the winery and \$12,000. When we use up your \$12,000, then we use my \$12,000 and when my \$12,000 are used up, we'll use Domenico's \$12,000."

Neither I nor Domenico had \$10 apiece. Domenico was trembling. I said to him, "Please keep quiet." So we made the deal with Pagani. We made \$18,000 apiece net profit. We never used Pagani's \$12,000, because as fast as we made the wine, we sent it to New York to Tribuno's brother. We paid three cents a gallon for the spoiled wine to Pagani, and with a couple of thousand tons of grapes we made a good wine that Mario Tribuno sold for 26¢ per gallon.

There was a friend of ours in Kenwood who said to us, "I know where you can buy good wine and where you can buy a winery too." He was from Ukiah.



Perelli-Minetti:

On the way to Ukiah we bought all the spoiled wine of four or five small wineries, also the cooperage of some of them. We took it to Ukiah where we had made a deal with Mr. Gobbi, buying all his wine, part of which was very good and part spoiled. We bought grapes, refermented the spoiled wine, and made good wine of it.

Then Prohibition came, 1920. The vintage of 1919 was the last vintage officially open to make wine. We couldn't find any labor or men at that particular time. In those days I think [Raffaello] Petri used to buy every grape over there, so that year he wouldn't buy any more, as he could not see what to do with the wine.

I saw my opportunity and called a meeting of all the growers. The meeting was attended by a grape shipper whom I knew to be not so honest. I got in an argument with him and his strong man bodyguard, and I almost got in a fist fight. Mr. Schmidt, city mayor, acted as chairman of the meeting and favored my proposition.

I said, "We have no money. We are not going to buy the grapes. Nobody's going to buy the grapes and offer you cash. We'll offer 100 gallons of dry wine for each ton of grapes you deliver to the winery. But the surplus is ours as compensation for making the wine. We stand all the costs of making and disposing of the wine. We'll guarantee you more money than you've been receiving before, maybe \$5, maybe \$10 more a ton." Well, every pound of grapes in the Ukiah Valley and the Redwood Valley came to our winery.

French-American Company had a big winery which is now part of, I think, the Guild. So, French-American winery was for sale, and a group of growers had the option to buy it. The option would expire a certain day at noon. At that hour Shakes, president of the French-American Wine Company, was there at the bank, and he said to the growers, "Well, gentlemen, it's twelve o'clock. Is it yes or no?"

"No," answered the growers.

That morning I had agreed with Shakes that if the growers did not buy the winery I would buy it. The price was \$7,500, or one half cent a gallon if I rented it. Well,



Perelli-Minetti: we crushed some 11,000 tons of grapes and made close to two million gallons of wine, which meant more rent than the purchase price, so I bought it.

Time was pressing. The wine was drawn from the fermenters directly into the barrels and shipped as fast as could be, and returned 35¢ a gallon net to the grower, or \$35 per ton.

Teiser: Where were you shipping it?

Perelli-Minetti: To Tribuno, Senior, in New York.

Teiser: It could still be sold at that time?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, oh yes. That's why we took it out of the fermenting tanks, because on the 20th of January Prohibition went into effect, and we could not take a chance to have wine left over. Well, every grower agreed to have his money after the wine arrived in New York except a few growers who said, "Well, we don't know. We have to wait 'til the wine is sold, two, three weeks. You give us \$25 now before the wine is shipped."

"All right, let's go to the bank." And I called Mr. Mario Tribuno, "I've got" (I think it was) "about 3,500 tons of grapes. We can make \$35,000 or \$10 a ton, as these growers prefer \$25 now than \$35 later. Can you send the money tomorrow? \$75,000, \$80,000?"

He said, "You'll have the money tomorrow morning in the bank." Then I said to Charlie Mannon, president of the bank, "Charlie, I want you to bear witness to this. These people here, they're clients of yours. They want to sell their wine for 25¢ a gallon because they're afraid to wait, and I don't know just what is in their mind. But I think they make a mistake because they're losing \$10, a ton, and then when everybody else gets more money, I'll be a s.b. because they will say that I convinced them to sell. I'm against their sale at 25¢ a gallon, which is against my interest. But because I want to live in Ukiah, and when I meet these people on the street, I want to be able to look them in their face...." Then I said, "All right, tomorrow we'll meet here at the bank and we'll get you the money."



Perelli-Minetti: In the morning they had all the warehouse receipts, all the weigh-tags, in their hands, and I said, "Now before you turn these receipts to the bank, I want to repeat--here is Mr. Mannon, here is the cashier of the bank (a fellow by the name Bromley). I said, "You're making a mistake; you're losing \$10 a ton. You still have time to withdraw your offer." They said, "No, we will take the \$25 cash now." "Remember," I said, "that when the other growers receive the \$35, I do not want you to say I am a s.b.--for accepting the offer."

Teiser: Did you call your company then California Grape Products?

Perelli-Minetti: California Grape Products, yes, after it was incorporated.\*

Teiser: You named it that when you began with Mario P. Tribuno?

Perelli-Minetti: No, I was working with Tribuno at that time in Ukiah only on a fee. I wasn't part of the company yet. Then when we made so much money in Ukiah, I got my share. So Tribuno said to me. "Tony, we'd better make a corporation and I'll give you 20 per cent of the company and 20 per cent to my brother Domenico, and I'll keep 60 per cent. Won't cost you a cent if you stay with me." I said, "Sure."

The company they had in New York was Tribuno and Garrish.

Teiser: Was Garrish in New York?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. But I think he had sold out to Tribuno, so Tribuno was alone then, and it was the Tribuno company.

The winery of French-American Wine Company, that I bought in Ukiah, was enlarged, and Tribuno wanted to call the new company Mendocino Wine Company. I said, "Don't sound good; let's make it California Grape Products." He said, "We'll make it California Grape Products Company." We put a big sign across the building, six foot letters, and were thinking about a trademark for the grape syrup we were going to make. Domenico and I were looking at the sign, and Domenico said, "Cali-gra-po." From California Grape Products Company it came out Caligrapo. That was in 1920. In 1920, I advised Mr. Tribuno to get Professor Monti to come over, because Professor Monti was the author of the cold process of making grape syrup. He was a man eighty-two years old.

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\*The date of incorporation was February 18, 1920.



Teiser: Professor Eudo Monti?

Perelli-Minetti: I think so. He used to make digested food for the Emperor of Austria, eggs and meats and grape juice. The Emperor of Austria had no stomach at all. And so we got Professor Monti in Ukiah. He was there about four or five months. All his expenses paid and I think plus \$2,000. And so I was with Professor Monti in making the concentrates, and I learned more about making wine in making concentrates than I knew before, although I thought I knew quite a bit. But in making concentrates, I learned a great many things that we didn't know before. And so we made concentrate that we packed in gallon cans. It had a beautiful lithographed label, and on the back side "Caution! when diluted, don't put in a warm place because it will ferment, and that is against the law." Because we figured that as long as the grapes were going east for wine making by families, if we could convince the families that they could make as good wine without having to dispose of the grape pomace, and besides they could make wine the year round, we would establish a good business.

Teiser: What markets did that go into then?

Perelli-Minetti: Mostly New York, Chicago, and New Orleans, by the carload. We were selling that in those days, \$2.50 a gallon, which we don't sell today for that price.

I had the price list of our Anglo-California wines that we sold in 1908, '09, '10 before we had to close. We sold sherry for \$1.50 a gallon, wholesale. You don't get half that much today. Sherry sells for 60¢ a gallon today. There was good money in the wine business.

Teiser: You were making the grape concentrate in Ukiah?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, oh yes. After Prohibition, we got Mr. Monti, as I told you. Now one of the reasons I say I learned more about making wine was this. We bought a concentrator in Buffalo that was never delivered. We had about 3,000 tons of crushed grapes, in tanks, under refrigeration. But after while we found out that when the yeast becomes accustomed to the temperature, it starts to work. (That's one important thing I learned about making wine.) All those tanks started to ferment at the same time. You couldn't go into the room because the gas was too strong.



Perelli-Minetti: I said to myself, "Here we lose everything." But when the fermentation was completed I found we had made the most beautiful wine! So when I started down here in Delano making white wines, I used to freeze the juice down to 32 and abandon it; never checked it any more 'til the fermentation was over. We made better wine, with more alcohol, for the same amount of sugar, because it was less loss of alcohol by lower temperature.

Teiser: What did you do with the wine that you made in Ukiah by that method? What market could you find for it?

Perelli-Minetti: This was in Prohibition, when we made this wine, we couldn't sell it. We had to store it.

Teiser: You didn't sell wine to churches, or anything of that sort?

Perelli-Minetti: No. We had a million gallons of wine, made in Ukiah during Prohibition, and we had that for 13 years, until Fruit Industries was organized. I was one of the charter members of Fruit Industries. And that wine went into Fruit Industries. That was the most beautiful wine Fruit Industries had. We never took care of the wine, and it never spoiled. It was magnificent wine, all the result of low fermentation starting at 32° or less.

Teiser: And that stayed in storage until Repeal?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

#### VENTURES WITH DI GIORGIO AND WALLACE

Teiser: When you made an agreement with Mr. Joseph Di Giorgio...

Perelli-Minetti: We started the vineyard first, and then we built a plant for concentrating grape juice.

Teiser: Right here near Delano?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, we had 160 acres. The plant later became part of Fruit Industries. The Di Giorgios acquired it and later sold it to Schenley. We built that.



Teiser: Where is it?

Perelli-Minetti: It is located at Trocha, about eight miles from here; it adjoins Lanza's winery. After we got started we bought 640 acres from a Mr. Taylor for cash.

Teiser: Is that Walter Taylor?

Perelli-Minetti: No, no, no, no. Walter Taylor had nothing to do with that. I didn't even know him then; that was before we started Fruit Industries.\* I think that was in 1927. I made a deal with Mr. Di Giorgio. He would furnish the land, well and pipe line, we would plant half with varieties of his choice, the other half of ours, and do all the work until the third year; that is, we plant the vines, put the stakes and everything else, and bring it to production. And that was the price we paid for our half. Through that method, we put together 1,500 acres.

In the meantime, California Grape Products Company had joined Fruit Industries. Then something happened between Mario Tribuno and myself. We didn't agree on a policy. He was in New York, and Fruit Industries headquarters were in San Francisco. It was hard for him to follow, and we decided to split.\*\* Then I started with Wallace.\*\*\* Lanza, in the meantime, with Victor Repetto, bought California Grape Products, as Mario Tribuno would not continue the business.\*\*\*\*

Teiser: You didn't have Lanza and Repetto as your partners?

Perelli-Minetti: No, no. I had separated completely from Tribuno. I was out completely. Lanza and Repetto bought Tribuno out, I think for \$250,000.

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\*In 1929. See pp. 75ff. and other references as indexed.

\*\*See also pp. 123-124.

\*\*\*See p. 42.

\*\*\*\*See also Horace O. Lanza and Harry Baccigaluppi, California Grape Products and Other Wine Enterprises, and Victor Repetto, A Career in the Wine Industry in New York and California, Regional Oral History interviews in this series.



Perelli-Minetti:

Just a year before Prohibition was repealed, I said to Mr. Di Giorgio, "Joe, it seems that Prohibition's going to be repealed. There are, maybe eight, ten thousand tons of grapes left on the vines. Why don't we make wine out of those grapes? You have the Fruit Industries winery now." Di Giorgio said, "Well, I have no money; can't do it." I said, "If you haven't the money, what do you think about me? I haven't any money." Then he said, "You pick your grapes, and we pick our own, and we bring them in." So we made wine. Di Giorgio's part was about half a million gallons and mine was quite a bit, 200,000, maybe more.

Then Di Giorgio made a deal with Lanza, and he wanted me to turn the keys of the winery over to Lanza. I said, "No." He said, "I'll send the sheriff." I said, "I am sorry. You can send the president. Possession is 95 per cent of the fight. You taught me that. I am sorry, but I can't agree to give up the keys." Then young Joe Di Giorgio, who is in Arvin now, came up and he said, "Tony, my uncle is very mad. Can't we fix this?"

"Sure. All I want is for Di Giorgio to write me a letter to guarantee me the safety of my wine; that's all I want." I said, "The man that is going to operate the winery has no taste. I put that much vinegar [measuring two inches with fingers] in a bottle and then filled it with wine and shook it and had him taste it. He said, 'That was good wine.'"

I said, "Joe, how could you expect me to turn the keys in?"

When Di Giorgio came back--he was then in England--Lanza was putting all his grapes in the winery, and Di Giorgio's grapes were falling off the vines. Di Giorgio was mad. "My God," he said to Lanza, "you take your wine out of here in one week or I will open all the valves." Lanza gave Di Giorgio the wine and he took some of his grapes.

Then Di Giorgio needed more room, and he said, "Tony, can you take your wine out?" I said, "Which tank?" He said, "You go there and pick any tank and take it out." So you can imagine I picked the best tank, that's natural. Business is business. So I took the wine out. As a matter of fact, I sold it to Livermore, Healdsburg, Ukiah.



Perelli-Minetti: I started with 85¢ a gallon. No matter what the price, I would sell even 20¢. I would make a profit. It cost me a few cents only.

I had already built the winery on the Wallace Ranch, so I could store the white wine I made at Di Giorgio's. That's the adobe building with the wooden tanks in it. That was cooerage that the Redwood Corporation sold to me on credit.\*

Teiser: You also built a winery that was later Cresta Blanca's down in this area?

Perelli-Minetti: That was the one we built with Tribuno that went into Fruit Industries. In 1930, it was enlarged to take care of the grapes, and we made a concentrate, and that's when the chief chemist of Fruit Industries said that the winery was contaminated. It was a new winery. Remember I told you about the yeast?\*\* So that's it.

Teiser: Yes. And that's now...?

Perelli-Minetti: Schenley. Di Giorgio sold that; also some vineyards, 3,000 or 4,000 acres and all the wine for \$11,000,000 to Schenley. And then we built our new plant facing Highway 99 in 1936 when I incorporated A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons.

In 1931, I think it was, I applied for \$25,000 to Bank of America. They refused it. And one afternoon the head man of Security Bank in Fresno came down to the Wallace Ranch. He said, "We would like to finance you. How much money do you need?" I said, "\$30,000, I think, is all I need now, at this moment." That was in 1931 when the Repeal was voted to take effect in 1932, I think. "But," he said, "you have to give a warehouse receipt to Lawrence Warehouse." I said, "That's going to make it tough because it'll cost me another cent a gallon."

"Well, the bank has to be protected."

"Very well. I have to pay the price." In those days, I think it was five per cent interest; wasn't very bad.

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\*See p. 43.

\*\*See pp. 13-14.



Perelli-Minetti: And by the end of that year they had loaned me \$160,000.

Then Wallace had some financial trouble. I was in Sacramento at a big convention there to decide about some issues on the wine industry. Jim Vai was there, and we came back together on the same Pullman; I sold him 400,000 or 500,000 gallons at 50¢ a gallon. That was just the day before Christmas. On the 20th of January, the wine went down to 20¢. So Jim Vai said, "My God, what am I going to do?" "Well," I said, "you have millions. Don't worry. You'll get it out." Because he had millions. But he said, "Give me a discount."

"How much do you want?"

"\$10,000." I said, "Jim, I haven't the money, but I'll give you \$10,000 worth of wine, whatever it is, 20,000 gallons, 30,000 gallons, 20¢ a gallon."

That's what we settled. Because when I had a debt and I could pay with wine, I always paid with it. In Vai's case I made a profit, because instead of paying him \$10,000, I actually paid \$9,000, which was the cost of the wine.

Teiser: All this time you were running these properties, you also had this present property too?

Perelli-Minetti: In a way, yes. We didn't have anything. The approach from this plant to Delano was the worst sight that you could think of. They called it "badlands."

Teiser: It's very sandy, isn't it?

Perelli-Minetti: No, it was alkali, it was awful to look at. It gave a horrible impression. So I started buying this land for \$25 an acre.

Teiser: When did you start?

Perelli-Minetti: A couple of years before we built this winery. Wallace could not stand it that he couldn't go to the winery and boss everybody. He couldn't say anything. I had the place, and that was it. One day Mr. Wallace said to me, "Why don't we split?" I said, "Any time you want, I'll split."



Perelli-Minetti: "You name the conditions and and if acceptable, I'll split."

I'll come to that later.\*

#### BEGINNINGS OF A. PERELLI-MINETTI & SONS

Perelli-Minetti: So I started buying these lands in small pieces, because this land had previously been bought in five and ten acre tracts for oil investment. I said to myself, if I buy it, if I put the winery on it, with the winery refuses I can neutralize the alkali and have the best soil. Further, it has a future for industrial purposes. It faces the railroad and Highway 99.

Every time I bought a piece of land, I had the surveyor come in and give me a map of it. I had bought an 80-acre piece that I thought went to the railroad; I found after surveying, it did not, and naturally I could not afford to build the winery until I secured the land facing the railroad.

It happened one day the president of the local bank called me and he said, "Tony, I've got a fellow here that wants to sell 20 acres. You'll need \$1,000. Do you want to buy it?"

I said, "Yes." So that's the way I got to the railroad.\*\* There was an editorial written in the town paper here when I bought this land, and why I bought this land, and the idea was to remove the unsightly look, which was unbearable. Really, when you came in to Delano from the south, it looked like Death Valley.

Teiser: How did you know it was going to be good grape land?

Perelli-Minetti: To begin I didn't give a darn about that. I knew one thing: that we had the highway and we had the railroad; we had no

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\*P. 101

\*\*The winery is adjacent to the Southern Pacific main line and has a siding. See also p. 101.



Perelli-Minetti: industry, and some day industry would come here. That was the main purpose. The vineyard was secondary. The refuse of the winery is acid; it neutralizes the alkali and puts in fertilizer. So I had two shots, one to improve the land. Alkali land is made of the finest silt, and to prove that to you: on 270 acres, on three vine blocks which we were planting, the water from one well, within two hours, had gone past each block clear to the railroad track, some 4,000 feet, just like running on glass. When we started putting the winery refuse on the same land, the same pump, the water would irrigate only eight rows of one block. The alkali comes to the surface by capillarity; then the wind blows it away. So that's how we reclaimed the land.

Teiser: Did you first bring in grapes from elsewhere to make wine here?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. We bought about 10,000 tons of grapes, and the refuse of those grapes went on that land. Then we started planting.

#### BEGINNINGS OF FRUIT INDUSTRIES

Teiser: Were you ever involved with the Guasti Italian Vineyard Company?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: When was that?

Perelli-Minetti: During the Depression.

Teiser: That was after you had established this winery?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. That was after 1936. But before, Guasti was president of Fruit Industries--young Guasti [Secondo Guasti, Jr.].\*

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\*See p. 119 and other references as indexed.



- Teiser: Oh, this ties in with Fruit Industries?
- Perelli-Minetti: That goes back to 1929.
- Teiser: I'll make a note and remind you as we get into the Fruit Industries story. Before we come to that, let me go back to the pre-Prohibition period and ask you a question about that. Some members of the industry, I understand, campaigned quite vigorously against Prohibition. Did you?
- Perelli-Minetti: No, I did not. The man who did most was Andrea Sbarboro. Italian Swiss Colony joined with California Wine Association and all the big fellows of the time, but the man who went to Washington was Andrea Sbarboro. He was president of the Italian-American Bank, which later was absorbed, became Bank of Italy, and then became Bank of America.
- Teiser: Then, during the '20's I think, the California Vineyardists Association was formed under a man named Donald D. Conn. Did you have anything to do with that?
- Perelli-Minetti: No. That led to the birth of Fruit Industries. He was instrumental in organizing Fruit Industries. And we went to Washington. I was in Washington three months.
- Teiser: Let's go back and start with Fruit Industries. I see this all fits together in ways that I didn't understand.
- Perelli-Minetti: Donald Conn was a promoter. Hoover was being groomed for president, and we were assured of a loan of \$5,000,000 if we took care of as many grapes as it was possible. Hoover had pledged himself to it if he became president, to see that we get a loan of \$5,000,000.
- Teiser: For what?
- Perelli-Minetti: For salvaging the grape industry,\* in California.
- Teiser: How was it going to be done?
- Perelli-Minetti: By buying grapes, making concentrates and by-products, as members of Fruit Industries. So we built the plants and

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\*See also pp. 124-126.



Perelli-Minetti: had wineries throughout the state. Some had concentrators like Community winery\* in Lodi, and Guasti. The plant in Delano that California Grape Products had established was enlarged, and became the biggest one. And that's why Fruit Industries had the big laboratory in San Francisco where there was evolved a practical way to make wine from concentrate throughout the United States. That was the idea. But instead of getting \$5,000,000, we got \$1,000,000, out of which Mrs. [Mabel Walker] Willebrandt was paid \$100,000.

Teiser: So the Conn deal was a failure?

Perelli-Minetti: The Conn deal was a failure in that he was not a business man, he was a promoter.

Teiser: I'd like to ask some questions about Fruit Industries....

Perelli-Minetti: Some I can answer, some I won't answer.

In November, 1929, we campaigned in Washington to salvage the industry because it had been arranged with Hoover at Stanford, where he was living then, that he would have financing for Fruit Industries to help put the grape industry back on its feet. Captain [Paul] Garrett, Hugh Adams, his general salesman, and then the attorney from there, I forget his name, [Secondo] Guasti [Jr.], [James A.] Barlotti, myself. We were all in Washington.

Teiser: Barlotti was with Guasti at that time?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, he was. So we were all in Washington. We used to meet in New York at Di Giorgio's to go over the plans, then get back to Washington, back and forth. So we spent about three months I think. Finally we came back to California and organized Fruit Industries. I was one of the charter members. Guasti and Barlotti--there were quite a number of names. Fruit Industries took over the plants and made Guasti its headquarters then. Later it was moved to San Francisco when Fruit Industries took over the California Wine Association.

Teiser: How did Fruit Industries happen to take over California Wine Association? Were you in on that?

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\*Community Grape Corporation



Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes.

Teiser: What was the mechanism?

Perelli-Minetti: The mechanism was very simple. Mr. [Joseph] Grace owned California Wine Association and was a member.

Teiser: Of Grace Brothers?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. So Grace was in Fruit Industries, and he got so fed up, and he said, "I'll get out." And he sold, and Fruit Industries bought California Wine Association for \$2,500.

Teiser: What did you get for your \$2,500?

Perelli-Minetti: We got the labels and the name, the plant, which was owned by Santa Fe railroad.

Teiser: Where was that plant?

Perelli-Minetti: On Minnesota Street in San Francisco. California Wine Association had no wine in the plant. Grace came in just to make everything as big as possible. So did Di Giorgio. Di Giorgio put nothing in, just an old winery building that had been mostly dismantled many years before, located in Sanger. But Fruit Industries wanted Di Giorgio for the effect. The place meant nothing. So we got quite a number of wineries, but the principals came in first--Di Giorgio, Grace Brothers, ourselves--that was California Grape Products Company--Guasti, Garrett, Community. These were the big ones. Then [Walter E.] Taylor was made general manager; he was with Community. Then we got the other wineries in one by one. We practically had 70 per cent of the grape business of the state. And then when Repeal came, well, Fruit Industries had lots of wine--used to sell quite a bit for sacramental purposes--and the concentrate was made into wine too.

Teiser: At the time that you formed this organization, you were quite sure that Repeal was coming?

Perelli-Minetti: Judging from the way things went, everyone felt it could not last. Hoover had assured that it would come, and when Roosevelt was elected, he came right out against Prohibition. There was no doubt about it.



Perelli-Minetti: A couple hundred thousand tons of grapes were shipped east during Prohibition, and maybe more. Practically all the grapes in the state went east. And if you figure the amount of wine that was made from those grapes plus the addition of sugar and water, you would have seven, eight hundred million gallons of wine that was consumed during Prohibition. That consumption disappeared the moment Prohibition was repealed, because the saloon came in and the people that were raised on cocktails during Prohibition went for sweet wine.

The opening of the saloon, in my judgment, killed the dry wine market overnight. And that was a pitiful thing. After Repeal, the sale of dry wine was about 10 per cent of that of sweet wine, which was just the opposite of before Prohibition when the dry wine was about 90 per cent. And the reason the sweet wines were made in the valley in pre-Prohibition times was that they were easier to make than dry wines, and many winemakers of those times failed in the attempt to make dry wines.



(Interview #3 - May 17, 1969)

JOSEPH DI GIORGIO AND SECONDO GUASTI

Teiser: When did you first know Joseph Di Giorgio?

Perelli-Minetti: 1922. That's when Mr. Tribuno and Di Giorgio met on the boat.\*

Teiser: You hadn't met him before that?

Perelli-Minetti: I knew who he was, but never met him. Di Giorgio came over here because he bought the agricultural interest of Armour Packing Company in California. Armour had big estates in the fruit business. Di Giorgio bought it out. He was in the fruit business. Di Giorgio had several ships. He controlled the banana industry of the world in those days. He had, I don't know, 20 ships plying between Guatemala and Mexico and the Bahamas and Jamaica.

Teiser: Were the Armour properties here in the San Joaquin Valley?

Perelli-Minetti: They were in the Sacramento Valley. And then he came to Delano and later Arvin to raise grapes.

Teiser: Was he interested in wine?

Perelli-Minetti: Just in the grapes at the beginning. He thought the wine should be sold like fresh fruit, at auction. He wanted to put in the money today and get it out tomorrow.

Teiser: He must have been a remarkable man.

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\*See p. 54.



Perelli-Minetti: He was.

Teiser: Was he very intelligent?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh sure. He started selling lemons in Baltimore when he was 14 years old when he came to this country. With a little cart. When he was 20 years old, he was the director of a big bank there, which had started loaning money. That gave him his start.

Teiser: Did his sons continue his business?

Perelli-Minetti: He had no children of his own. He was married twice, but no children from either wives. These are his nephews.

Teiser: What did he look like?

Perelli-Minetti: He was a very handsome man. Somewhat gave me the impression of Stalin.

Teiser: Strong?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, strong man. He would fight anybody. He fought the United Fruit Company for twenty years and made the United Fruit Company come to his terms.

Teiser: Lots of courage?

Perelli-Minetti: Lots of courage and lots of guts. More than courage [laughter]. He was a very handsome man, so different from his brother, you never would tell they were brothers.

Teiser: The other family that I kind of associate with the Di Giorgio family is the Guasti family.

Perelli-Minetti: The Guasti family has only two sons left. Well, five children were born to Guasti.

Teiser: Secondo Guasti, Senior?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, Senior. They all died except the last one, Secondo Guasti, Jr. But he died when he was barely 42 years old. Kidney trouble. He was married to the daughter of the president of the Union Oil Company, of Los Angeles. And they had two children,\* Guasti III and Bill. One, I think

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\*See also pp. 119-121.





Relief of Secondo Guasti, founder of Italian Vineyard Company, on church at Guasti.



Secondo Guasti, Jr. Photograph courtesy of Harry Baccigaluppi.



Perelli-Minetti: Bill, married Daniels' daughter of the one in the picture business, you know?

Teiser: Bebe Daniels?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. The other one, I do not remember the girl's name whom he married. Guasti III looked exactly like his grandfather. Bill took after his mother.

Teiser: What did his grandfather look like?

Perelli-Minetti: Quite a handsome man. I've got some pictures some place.

Teiser: Was he big? small?

Perelli-Minetti: He was about my size.

Teiser: Was he a forceful man also?

Perelli-Minetti: Very forceful. He came through Mexico, so he used to tell me. He was inducted into the army as a cook. He finally escaped to California. He saw the possibilities of the wine business. He came from Piedmont.\* And you know the Italians, all they see is wine, any place they go. And in the Cucamonga district, mostly desert then, he stuck a few vines here and there in the ground before anybody knew it, and they grew beautifully. Then he organized a company called the Italian Vineyard Company, a stock company.

You know the name of Cucamonga, how it came about so they say? In the early days, the Indians attacked Cucamonga and there was a fight that lasted several days, and when it ended it was found the cook had been killed. So the owner called to the men, "Is there a cook among you?" So that's where they got Cucamonga. That's the legend.

Teiser: [Laughing] Had his family grown grapes in Piedmont?

Perelli-Minetti: I think so.

Teiser: So he knew that much about it?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, yes. He was a very forceful man. As a matter of fact,

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\*Italy



Perelli-Minetti: at one time he fought the California Wine Association, Lachman & Jacobi, Italian Swiss Colony, and everybody. It was a price war. Port wine, sherry, and every kind of sweet wine was sold in New Orleans for 10¢ a gallon, including the barrel, freight and everything. Finally the trust had to bow to him.

Teiser: New Orleans was a big market, was it not?

Perelli-Minetti: In those days, sure. Italian, French people, they all drank wine.\* New York was a big market. People bought by the barrel. Mostly dry wine in the North. In the South it was mostly sweet wine.

Teiser: Sweet wines in New Orleans?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

#### FRUIT INDUSTRIES AND THE CALIFORNIA WINE ASSOCIATION

Teiser: I think you were starting yesterday to tell about Fruit Industries. The early days of it.

Perelli-Minetti: Well, as I said, I don't remember exactly the date we incorporated it.

Teiser: 1929.

Perelli-Minetti: So we established then. I was one of the directors up to the time it was sold. Fruit Industries' name, when Repeal came, was changed to California Wine Association.

Teiser: The original members--I think you mentioned most of them. Colonial Grape Products was also an original member, was it not?

Perelli-Minetti: That was [Sophus] Federspiel.

Teiser: But it stayed in only a little while?

Perelli-Minetti: Just a little while because they could smell there wasn't.... They wanted to be independent. That's when Colonial and Lanza were together.

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\*See also Sydney J. Block, Selling California Wines in New Orleans, a Regional Oral History Office interview in this series.



- Teiser: Of the original group, were there a few members who were dominant and the rest going along, or was it pretty domocratic?
- Perelli-Minetti: Mostly they were pretty passive. The members that remained in were Jack Bare's family,\* Cherokee Vineyards, Lodi Winery, ourselves; we bought Lodi out last year.
- Teiser: Was it a co-operative?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Jack Bare was individually owned, but Cherokee and Lodi were co-ops.
- Teiser: Who was Jack Bare?
- Perelli-Minetti: Jack Bare was a very successful grower in Lodi. He had about 600 acres of vineyard and had a small winery, and joined Fruit Industries. For a long time he was president. When Guasti died, James Barlotti became president, followed by Mr. Bare. The presidents were rotated; it was an honorary position rather than a management position. Management was Walter Taylor; he was the actual manager up to the time he withdrew, and then my son Mario was named manager. That was in 1951.\*\*
- Teiser: A.W. Morrow was what?
- Perelli-Minetti: A.W. Morrow was in charge of production.
- Teiser: Was he a very knowledgeable wine man?
- Perelli-Minetti: I think he was the best man in California.
- Teiser: I hear some people say so and some people say not, so I'm interested that you think he was.
- Perelli-Minetti: My opinion of Mr. Morrow is high. I met Mr. Morrow in 1903, and I worked under him, made wine for him in Livermore at the old Pioneer Winery, which belongs now to Schenley. And he had one of the finest palates in the country. He was an authority on wine, was production superintendent of California Wine Association when I was there in 1903. He was a young man. California Wine Association didn't go with favors, it went with the best man. And he was the best man California Wine Association

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\*Rancho del Oso Winery

\*\*Announcement of the resignation and appointment was made early in December, 1950. (Lodi News Sentinel, Dec. 5, 1950, "Taylor Quits Position as F.I. Manager."



- Perelli-Minetti: had, and he remained all the time with California Wine Association. Then he became actual manager and president, I believe. When P.C. Rossi died, Italian Swiss Colony, Lachman & Jacobi, they all merged with California Wine Association. It became one big company later. Italian Swiss Colony became part of California Wine Association.
- Teiser: Oh. I didn't know what the immediate circumstance was.
- Perelli-Minetti: The circumstance of that was the accidental death of Pietro Rossi. Otherwise it never would have happened. So California Wine Association became one big corporation.
- Teiser: Was Garrett & Company in Fruit Industries at the beginning?
- Perelli-Minetti: One of the organizers. That's right.
- Teiser: Was it a leader in it?
- Perelli-Minetti: It was. Then [Paul] Garrett withdrew, but his people remained in Fruit Industries. Hugh Adams was the general salesman for Garrett and became salesman of Fruit Industries.
- Teiser: Did the Garrett interests dominate the organization?
- Perelli-Minetti: He was a powerful man. He did not dominate because in a co-op you can dominate to a certain point, but no more. You have to do that by conviction. But I would suggest that you get in touch with Walter Taylor. He's still alive. Because he has everything on the tips of his fingers, more than I have because I've been interested in many other things, and he retired in 1951.
- Teiser: I've spoken to him and he's reluctant, partly because his wife is ill, I think. I hope in the end he will give an interview. Did Fruit Industries get into brandy production rather early, after Repeal?
- Perelli-Minetti: We used to make brandy for Fruit Industries. We were the first one to make the brandy.
- Teiser: That was at your own winery?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right. It was our own winery, which now belongs to the growers, Delano Growers Cooperative. And as a matter of fact, the first brandy labels of Fruit Industries read



Perelli-Minetti: "produced by Perelli-Minetti & Sons." The people who bought the brandy still remember that (those that are left). We made all the brandy for California Wine Association.

Our brandy sales now, according to the last report I got, while they are not the highest in the industry, during 1968 and this part of '69, the increase percentagewise is higher than the industry. The sales are not as big as Schenley or Christian Brothers. But if the Christian Brothers increased their sales 10 per cent, we increased 25 per cent. It is practically double of the industry.

Teiser: There is an A.R. Morrow brand, of brandy?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. A.R. Morrow brandy is 100 proof.

Teiser: You make it now?

Perelli-Minetti: We make it now.

Teiser: And you have another label?

Perelli-Minetti: Aristocrat. Then we've got a couple of other labels.

Teiser: This was one of the points of contention in the California Wine Association, I understood, at an earlier time. Some of the people thought that there were too many labels, that all of the products of the California Wine Association should be given one set of identifiable names. Do you remember this discussion?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, California Wine Association in the early days had many registered labels. So gradually they were reduced to the most important ones. And for some we had to fight. Now, for instance, Greystone was given, in part, a separate territory--now Italian Swiss Colony has it in some parts of the country.\* Now L & J, California Wine Association tried to take over the name and had to fight and go to court--although relations with Comiskey\*\* were not ruined. They

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\*For further information on the Greystone label, see Louis Petri, The Petri Family in the Wine Industry, a Regional Oral History Office interview in this series completed in 1971.

\*\*James E. Comiskey Company, New Orleans.



- Perelli-Minetti: still are our customer, but we wanted ownership of the label. We had many lawsuits like that to establish the propriety of the labels.
- Teiser: Then some people felt that it was important to maintain the old labels in the markets in which they were known, is that it?
- Perelli-Minetti: Oh absolutely, because the label is what sells. See [showing a label], that's one of the labels for California Wine Association.
- Teiser: It's a beautiful label, isn't it?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Wahtoke. Now that belonged to Cella. That winery there in Wahtoke belonged to Cella and now belongs to United Vintners.
- Teiser: There certainly have been a lot of changes like that.
- Perelli-Minetti: Really many changes.
- Teiser: Back to Fruit Industries. I notice that in 1934 there was a reorganization. What was the purpose of that?
- Perelli-Minetti: Well, the reorganization was because of the change of Prohibition, to put more into the wine line. Because before we used to make concentrate, in order to salvage the grape. But then when the wine came, naturally everybody tried to get into the wine business, and Fruit Industries did. At that time we had 70 per cent, or maybe a little over 70 per cent, of the sales of California. We could have maintained that position.

#### FAMILY COMPANIES

- Perelli-Minetti: I admire Gallo because I admire any man's intelligence when he gets ahead. I'm not jealous. It pleases me to see, especially like the Gallo boys, the way they improve themselves tremendously. He's a dynamic fellow.\* The only

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\*Ernest Gallo



Perelli-Minetti: thing that bothers me, what happens when they go?

Teiser: Many in the industry seem to admire the Gallos.

Perelli-Minetti: They took advantage of the position they were in, one label. Other people were fighting each other, and they just took advantage. And he had the vision and the courage to do it, that's all.

Teiser: I guess he's a very hard worker, too, isn't he?

Perelli-Minetti: Tremendously hard worker, and he's a very good family man. His wife used to tell me all the time, no matter what he does, he's really a good family man. Which is very seldom you see that.

She is Franzia's sister.\* And sometimes people, at least in the industry, believe that Franzia is a front for many cheaper wines that Gallo is selling. Other people say no, that in business they're just like cats and dogs. But anyway, whatever the combination is, it's a damn good combination because they're successful; they're both successful. But Franzia never wanted to raise the price, except now lately they have started to do so.

Teiser: It's interesting to see how well a well-managed family company does do.

Perelli-Minetti: It is. Unfortunately, the tax...and we had lots of trouble with Uncle Sam on this land here. The well water was too deep and wasn't aerated, and the vines weren't doing too well. In order to get canal water we had to sign a contract to sell the land at the prevailing price at the termination of it. So when the canal came through, we signed a contract with Uncle Sam for only ten years, and before we signed the contract--we have the correspondence to show it--I wrote to Washington stating that it was a family corporation, that the place was owned by the family. And they said, we realize that, but under the law it's a

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\*Ernest Gallo married the daughter of Giuseppe Franzia, whose five sons carried on the family winery.



Perelli-Minetti: corporation, so it's only one, and entitled only to 160 acres.\* Now that law is wrong. The interpretation of the law is wrong. It's been an abuse by the Department of the Interior for the simple reason that I was in this country when that law went in, and I know all the debating that was done in Congress at the time. First National Bank, the Crocker National Bank, and the Del Monte people owned a tremendous amount of land in that district there. It was all open land. And when the dam was completed, the 160-acre law was passed by Congress--to prevent open land owners from making a tremendous amount of money in the re-sale of that land, and that was the only purpose--not developed land.

Teiser: Which dam is that?

Perelli-Minetti: The dam that's up there at the Merced River. So that law was passed to prevent that, but it did not intend, and does not mean that canal water would be subject to the 160-acre law for land that had been previously reclaimed and put in full production.

We have spent over a million dollars to the Southern California Edison Company in improving our land, in getting the water out of the ground. Where people had done the same thing, starved to accomplish something in developing a piece of desert land and making it bloom--then the Reclamation Bureau comes in and illegally practically confiscates that land. That is an abuse, but we are not big enough to fight that. And the people who tried to fight it never went back to the Congress and all the Congress records to see the purpose of that law. So then before the contract with the Department of Interior expired, we asked for a little more time to decide, if they would give us the time. Otherwise we knew what to do. The Bureau granted that, and so for two years we bickered back and forth, to try to achieve the form we could maintain the property within the family. But every time the Revenue said no: Can't do this because we'll assess you, we'll charge you the tax as it is now, 52 1/2 per cent, and so forth and so on. Then finally it was agreed that the shareholders of the company have an undivided interest in the

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\*Under the Central Valley federal irrigation project.



Perelli-Minetti: land. So there are 26 corporations now. It cost us about \$50,000 to do it. We've been operating on that corporation for three years this October.

Teiser: Is your daughter Jean your legal counsel?

Perelli-Minetti: Our legal counsel is O'Melveny and Myers of Los Angeles. They've been our attorneys since I split with Wallace. Jean was working in Los Angeles at that time with another law firm, doing research work and sometimes going to court too. She does minor things here, but any big problem we take it to O'Melveny and Myers.

Teiser: Specialists?

Perelli-Minetti: They have specialists in every line of business, and are the biggest company west of Chicago.

Teiser: I'd like to know what your first impressions of California were as a young man.

Perelli-Minetti: California, there is no question about it, was a paradise then. The people were all very friendly. Although to the Italians, the Americans were not in a way. We still were dagos. It might be excused if it refers to the people that came to the United States from the labor class, attracted by high wages. The intellectual class would not stoop to manual labor and would go to South America where the language is easier to master. Here you have a different situation. When I got to San Francisco there were only maybe seven or eight university people, graduates. The rest were from the laboring class, very intelligent, some. Some very ruthless, no respect for the law or the morals, which was the reason for the Americans' attitude.

But California was just beautiful. Sonoma County was pretty because agriculture, vineyards were all over; there was nothing but vineyards and prunes. The prunes were in very minor quantity, but the vineyards were all over. On top of the mountains, every place that you could look at, you saw vineyards. And those people worked hard. I remember I worked hard when I bought the ranch. I used to get up at three o'clock in the morning, clean my horses, take them to watering, then with the men feed them, go back home, make my breakfast, and then plow all day. So that's why I got along with my laborers very fine because I understand the laborer. Manual labor is hard.



## MECHANIZATION

Teiser: Have conditions changed though so that mechanical devices have taken over a fair amount of the labor?

Perelli-Minetti: The American, fundamentally, is lazy. So lazy that, as far as hard manual work is concerned, he invents something so as not to do the hard work. And that's been a blessing because so much hard work that we had to do by hand is not done today. It is progress.

Teiser: For instance, out here right now, what sort of things do you do that were not known even when you first came to California?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, mechanical tractors, mechanical sprays...many things that were fundamental in those days you had to do all by hand.

Teiser: Have you done any experiments with mechanical harvesting?

Perelli-Minetti: Not here, but we have gone where the experiments have been done. As a matter of fact, there is a vineyard near here, some 20 acres, that was planted and trained especially for mechanical harvesting. We have gone there and seen the harvesting done. It's a long way from being perfect, because I saw lots of waste. When the wire is beaten some of the grapes fall ahead, before they can get into the troughs of the harvesters. Then some other grapes would not get off; it takes a knife or a scissor to cut them off. You have to change completely the nature of the grape. You have to produce new types of grapes that have a brittle stem that will break off under little shock. But that shock has to be so that nothing ahead of the harvester falls on the ground. Because the leaves are quite matured, a greater number fall in the harvester through the blower that blows out most of the leaves. It throws out, also, a sizeable percentage of juice and skins and pulp--and juice is what grapes are purchased for.

It is like the cotton picker, like any other machine: it has to have a beginning and imperfection. Gradually it'll be perfected. It'll take some time yet until all these defects are eliminated. And then you have tremendous weight. The machine is bigger than this room. Its use is questionable in case of rains. Have you seen it?



Teiser: No.

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, it's a tremendous machine. It straddles the row, patterned to those trucks that carry lumber underneath. The tank truck follows the harvester, and the grapes are blown into the tank, and some of the juice and most of the leaves into the air. In most cases, the grapes become a poultice, especially if they are over-ripe by the time they reach the truck tank. But as I say, any first machine has its trouble, and in time we'll have it. But, you have to change the way of pruning the vines, you have to change the way of trellising the vines.

#### VINERY FINANCING AND MARKET STABILIZATION

Perelli-Minetti: After Prohibition was repealed everybody tried to get into the wine business. There were so many people in, qualified and unqualified, with money and without money, mostly without money. Gallo didn't have anything. We didn't have anything but mortgages, nothing but mortgages. All the land I bought, I bought on time, and made the land pay for itself. Walter Taylor one time told me, "Tony, you lift yourself with the bootstraps."

Our success is entirely due to the Security First National Bank, the liberal way they have financed us, and the policy of the Security National Bank that if you are in trouble, they'll loan more money to get you out. Other banks are liable to cut right there and salvage what they can. Now we have an open operating loan of over \$4,000,000. No mortgage, nothing, just our personal guarantee and that's all. As the money from the sales come in, it is turned in against the loan. At the end of the year if we owe money, we issue a note for whatever balance is due. Now that actually has been the reason for my success, because it gave us the ability to function, which I would not have been able to do under the way other banks operate. I had the freedom of the use of the money as I saw fit.



Teiser: Of course, they wouldn't have done it if you hadn't been able to function.

Perelli-Minetti: Naturally, but they gave me a chance. Guasti was with Security First National in Los Angeles. The president of the bank was Mr. [Joseph F.] Sartori, a little fellow, always with the big cigar. Cigar was as big as he was. He had no children; his adopted son, Wallace, was president of the bank later before Sartori died. He, Sartori, always used to tell me, "We will not loan money to anybody we have to watch with a shotgun. We don't want that business." They had taken over a couple of banks at that time in Arizona. He said, "We're cutting off so many of those customers. We are calling in those loans, arranging to get them paid, without hurting anyone. We don't want them on our books. We don't want anybody we have to watch with a shotgun."

Teiser: Was this quite different from the way the Bank of America operated during that period?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, I don't know how the Bank of America operated because I have no contact with the Bank of America.

Teiser: I know they were in wine a good deal.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Bank of America, for instance, you have to have 50 or 60 per cent of the money; they loan you the difference, as I understand. Security loans me money to buy the grapes and to operate until I sell the wine, which makes a big difference. They loan me 100 per cent on the cost of the wine, besides the money to operate the vineyard, a big difference. I don't know if other banks will do that. As I said before, my success is due to Security First National because in effect they have been a generous silent partner, and they have made money out of it too.

Teiser: I gather then that you have not had to go up and down with the various price stabilization attempts in the industry, that you've been fairly stable within yourself.

Perelli-Minetti: No, we had to go back and forth with that. Let me tell you this: For several years (I can show you the statement) we showed \$94 profit. Actually, we lost \$100,000. Because we have real estate from which we have an income of \$100,000 a year, which wasn't part of the wine industry. We had a loss of \$100,000 for each of those years.



Teiser: What years were those?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, three or four years ago.

Teiser: That recent?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. When you buy grapes at \$50 and sell wine on the \$30 grape, you lose \$20 a ton. It doesn't take much to figure that out.

Teiser: In the late '30's, the period just before the Second World War, when the prorate program was established, were you involved in that?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes.

Teiser: Were you in favor of the prorate program?

Perelli-Minetti: I was in favor of the prorate program because that's one of the few ways it could do justice to the grower. As a matter of fact, I didn't get the credit, but the program was written by me. I wrote the basic part of the program, because I know the industry, the value of the industry and what a ton of grapes would give you; it was put so that no one could take advantage of another. Somebody else got the credit of writing the program. It didn't matter to me. I was interested in the results and the grower.

Teiser: How did the prorate operate?

Perelli-Minetti: The prorate operated this way. The winery processed the grapes and gave the grower so much wine to a ton of grapes. It was approved by the state, established on the amount of wine that a ton of grapes would produce, I would say a good average formula. If you produced more because of efficiency, it was naturally to the winery's profit. So the grower would get what the industry average was, the average calculation made by the Department of Agriculture in Washington. Now that surplus was denied by Warren\* after we actually had approved the contracts. So he was in politics and...

Teiser: As attorney general?

Perelli-Minetti: As attorney general for the state.

Teiser: What did Warren do?

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\*Earl Warren



Perelli-Minetti: Welch. Naturally his position was delicate then.

I think I'm responsible for that because on my way to San Francisco, talking to a group of growers, I said, well, in our organization there is a profit for us of three or four per cent. And then naturally the growers got together, and from that hint they decided to challenge the industry. So the industry had to bow to the grower. I don't know how many thousands of barrels of alcohol were made from the surplus. In those days alcohol would be in drums and sent to a warehouse. I said, 'Why should I buy drums, pay transportation in and out, warehouse fees, etcetera? I'll just buy the tanks and keep the alcohol here at the winery under lock and key by the government.' So that's when we put those tanks in the little building I showed you that's going to come down.

Teiser: Had you already a bonded warehouse?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: You already had it, and this was just an additional one on the grounds?

Perelli-Minetti: We had the distillery, but no warehouse.

Teiser: That was the program that Burke Critchfield administered, was that it?

Perelli-Minetti: Critchfield, yes.\* Critchfield followed by an ex-general manager of Sun Maid, dead now.

Teiser: Was it a good enough program to use again?

Perelli-Minetti: You mean that prorated?

Teiser: Yes.

Perelli-Minetti: I don't believe in artificial programs. I believe in the survival of the fittest. I believe in competition. I don't think that condition will arise today because we haven't got enough grapes to go around. I'm fearful nevertheless this year of the change of weather, that if we should get rain during the picking season, we might have raisin grapes and part of the table grapes go into the winery. Then there would be no room in the wineries. I strongly believe that the three segments of the grape

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\*See also Burke H. Critchfield, The California Wine Industry During the Depression, a Regional Oral History Office interview completed in 1972.



Perelli-Minetti: industry (that is, table, raisin and wine) should be entirely defined, and each stand on its own feet so to speak. It would eliminate the scavenger who waits for such times, fills his winery, and breaks the price structure.

I claim (and I've always fought, and I've had many fights with [A.] Setrakian) that fresh table grape industry makes large profits on its investment, more than the grower who raises grapes for the winery or raisins. Like Setrakian and like growers that put culls and strippings into their winery--if those grapes were destroyed or prevented from going into the winery, that grower would not lose any money, because his shipping has produced handsome profits.

I stand on my feet on that. I've fought but have not been able to get anywhere. The three segments of the grape industry should stand on their own feet if the wine industry is to be stabilized as it should, and not subject to dumping because of low cost by those who crush their own culls and strippings--or the scavengers.

I've had many fights with Al Paul, and we were bitter business enemies, although we would have lunch together. But on the business end we were bitter enemies; we stood apart on different points. For instance, his company makes alcohol from the sweepings of the Raisin Association. They buy a few grapes, but 90 per cent of their alcohol is made from sweepings and damaged or under standard raisins. And his alcohol is sold to the winery. I contend that a raisin is not a fresh grape.

Teiser: Mr. Setrakian does the same?

Perelli-Minetti: No. Mr. Setrakian is a shipper of fresh grapes, but he has a co-op, and he takes all the culls and strippings he doesn't ship--the discard, what's left over on the vine that cannot be shipped.

Teiser: He's operating as a raisin man and you're operating as a wine man?

Perelli-Minetti: No. He's a wine man, too, but principally a fresh grape shipper and producer. He is a brilliant man and knows all the angles.



Teiser: We hope to interview him.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, he has an office in San Francisco. He is a very shrewd man. He's a brilliant speaker, and in so doing tears come down. It impresses the crowds.

Teiser: You're personal friends?

Perelli-Minetti: We are personal friends, and once in a while we fight too. I have supported him on many programs, and I fought him on the last one because the last one wasn't right and... And as a matter of fact his group at the meeting agreed that my program had merits. The chairman of the meeting asked me just to fight for my program. Mr. Setrakian was to cut down the tonnage that the grower could put into the winery because the wineries had too much inventory for five years, to be released one-fifth beginning the following year--which would not penalize the grower, whose profit is so limited that it could break some. And the grower was for it. But the wine people were against it, and both programs died.

Teiser: Was this 1961?

Perelli-Minetti: No, later; 1966 I think.

Ernie Gallo, in the elevator with me, said, "Well, Tony, you've got a cock-eyed idea; I don't like it." I said, "No, you don't like it, but it's good." He said, "What are we going to do for cooperage?"

"Oh," I said, "forget about the cooperage. You're selling inventory, and making room. What's the difference whether you freeze part of the space? You're just buying what you can replace in the sale, that's all you're doing."

Then he's come out with \$48 a ton offer for grapes the month before the crop can be delivered. So that shows there is a shortage of grapes. Gallo's offer proves it. But our company is too small to take the risk to offer that price so early in the season, so we buy a certain percentage of our requirements at the beginning, and the rest as the season progresses.

The conditions of the weather are so upset that God forbid we get rains; I would not be able to pick our grapes,



Perelli-Minetti: because this land here is so different from the land of Sierra Vista. There it can rain today, and you can go on it tomorrow, because it is the decomposed granite. This is all silt, and when wet, it takes a long time to dry out to permit implements to go over it. The grapes then must be picked in boxes and carried out, a very hard, costly job. If we lose the crop, we lose half a million dollars. Then we're in trouble.

So.... I don't go to church, but I hope that Almighty God keeps us free from rain during the season. Last year was a beautiful season. But you know there's always a first time, and this is not the first time that rain has come to California during picking season. But if we get rain like we had in February and March, my God, then you'll have 3,000,000 tons of grapes, if they can be picked, going to the winery, and there is no such capacity available for that. Many grapes will remain on the vines and the winery will pay just transportation charge and that's all. Because the grower has to unload the vine so as not to hurt the following crop.

FRUIT INDUSTRIES AND THE CALIFORNIA WINE ASSOCIATION  
(CONTINUED)

Teiser: Do you want to continue your recollections of Fruit Industries and California Wine Association?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, in what way?

Teiser: I think there was a 1934 reorganization and a 1937 one, wasn't there? You explained the 1934 one. Was there a 1937 reorganization?

Perelli-Minetti: I don't remember. We had many policy changes.

Teiser: Do you want to discuss them in any way?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, for instance, we had to close up the New York plant. Then came the sale of the New York plant.

Teiser: Why was that?



Perelli-Minetti: Because the business wasn't there. The expenses were high and then labor trouble with the union; they wanted to force us to keep it going without any changes, as the plant was old-fashioned. California Wine Association, I believe, built it just after the earthquake. Now a tunnel goes right under it.

California Wine Association built the Richmond plant in order to send their wines to New York by boat 50,000 gallons at a time, which was quite a saving.

Teiser: Winehaven, was that it?

Perelli-Minetti: Winehaven, yes. The New York plant was located close to the landing pier and the wine was pumped into the winery. In those days, all shipments of wine were made in barrels. California Wine Association figured out to ship the wine in bulk through the Panama Canal in to New York cheaper, thus making a profit for California Wine Association. At Winehaven, California Wine Association crushed grapes mostly from the Lodi district. California Wine Association had the Wahtoke and the Malaga plant, a huge one for those days. It's a cotton compressor now. California Wine Association had plants all over the state--had a plant in Gilroy, had one in Kingsburg.

Teiser: What was the history of that Kingsburg plant, the one that Louis Martini had at one time?

Perelli-Minetti: That was Italian Swiss Colony. That was built by Pietro Rossi. Malesani was superintendent of that and then Malesani was transferred to Asti before Prati. Malesani was returned to Kingsburg. Prati took over. I had left already that country then.

Italian Swiss Colony planted some 700 acres of vines somewhere in the Lemoore district, somewhere in that district, which was a failure in this: that the land compressed, strangled the vines. They all died. The same thing happened here in Terra Bella. The trunk above the ground would be say three inches in diameter; underneath it would be less than one inch and the vines would break off. An eastern corporation planted 5,000 acres of trees in the same district with the same result. There the Italian Swiss Colony had planted over 700 acres, which was a big planting in those days.



Perelli-Minetti: Then during Prohibition, Louis Martini made a deal with some people that were bean merchants. They put the capital and Louis Martini his knowledge, and received I believe one-third interest--a very intelligent person.

Teiser: During Prohibition a number of wineries continued operating.

Perelli-Minetti: Many were selling wine. The wineries that were selling wine, they were selling legally, so to speak. You had to have some kind of permit for religious purposes, and so the companies that were doing that were very few. Now, California Wine Association was the biggest one. Guasti was a big one. Others bootlegged their wines, had fires and collected insurance. Many went out of business.

Like Scatena\* went out, and Oliveto Wine Company, and many others closed up when Prohibition came. Georges de Latour had a legitimate business because all his wine sold through the Catholic churches because of his connection with Christian Brothers. He had an established market before Prohibition came in. So when Prohibition came in he was able to sell all his wine, legally, to all the dioceses in the United States, at a big profit I was told. He had that beautiful vineyard and a very productive piece of land. I knew Georges de Latour. As a matter of fact, my father was dealing with his family for years and shipping wine to Georges' father in Burgundy, from my home town.

Teiser: One of the people I think who ceased operation during Prohibition was Raffaello Petri? Did you know him?

Perelli-Minetti: I knew the grandfather of Louis, yes, I knew him well. He's the one who was buying all the grapes in Ukiah.\*\* And after '19, he just withdrew. He got out. He operated mostly around San Francisco.

Teiser: I'm just asking you about some random people here. I think you were mentioning the Guild Wine Company. Did you know Mr. L.K. Marshall?

Perelli-Minetti: Very well.

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\*Scatena Brothers Wine Company

\*\*See p. 57.



Teiser: Everyone speaks highly of him, was he a very skilled...?

Perelli-Minetti: He was an altruistic type of a man. He was a dreamer. And his dreams were too early for the times. He was not a very practical man. He died very young. I don't think he was even 60. Was a big man, a very influential man in the Lodi district. He knew how to dispose of wine, primarily.

Teiser: What did he try to do that was ahead of the time?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, he was part of Fruit Industries at one time, didn't like it, and organized the Guild.

Teiser: Others were dissatisfied at that same time?

Perelli-Minetti: Some was real, and some was purposely made to obtain a certain objective by an individual who thought that he could profit by it.

Teiser: May I ask you about the 1950 change in the California Wine Association? Your son Mario came in to succeed Mr. Walter E. Taylor.

Perelli-Minetti: My son was in already. You see, when Mario graduated from Stanford, I was very friendly with Senator [William G.] McAdoo. So I asked Mr. McAdoo, "Would you take my son in your law department, corporation department, so he can get the inside of the function of the government and he can defend himself better when he practices law for himself?" He said, "Yes, why don't you send him over?" So I sent Mario to Washington. I said, "You go to the Senator, get all the detail you can how the government functions, then you'll know better how to operate your law office." He was with Senator McAdoo for two years, and every day he would take Mrs. McAdoo home in her car; he would drive her home. He used to be an usher at the White House balls because McAdoo was a big dancer; very handsome. (He was a tall man. When he married, I think he was 72. She was 25, 26.)

Mario stayed there two years, then he said to me, "Papa, it's time for me to come back." He interviewed every law firm in Los Angeles, and decided to go with Mr. Anderson, who had a small office in the financial building across the Bank of America at Seventh and Spring Streets, for whatever he could make; no salary. I would pay all his expenses



Perelli-Minetti: because, I said, "One thing don't do, don't join the District Attorney office because politics...."

I told him what happened when we had the Anglo-California Wine Company. One of our customers was arrested for murder. His wife came to our San Francisco office, where I happened to be. I took her to T.C. Van Ness, the company lawyer, and explained what she had told me. Mr. Van Ness said, "I am a corporation lawyer. The best criminal lawyer in San Francisco is a young man by the name of Shapiro, but San Francisco is rotten. I advise you to go to Cook's office--a disbarred judge who had all the tongs' business in those days. The judge, when I tried to explain the case, said, "Never mind that. I know all about it. It will cost you \$2,000--\$500 this afternoon, \$500 at the inquest, and the balance next month, and he will be out in three months."

In Washington Mario learned that before going to court, a minute search of laws in the books was made, which came in handy to Mario when Mr. Anderson (who was gassed in World War I) represented Walt Disney in a case. In court he had a fainting. He said to Mario, "I think you'd better take it over, and I won't feel bad if you lose, because we can't win this case."

So when the case was resumed the following week, Mario had charge of the case, and asked the judge to throw the case out on such-and-such a point of law. The judge said, "Wait a minute; now I want a week's time to check on that law." Mario gave him the number of the law. The following week, the Judge threw the case out and Walter Disney won the case. The other fellow wasn't prepared, but Mario was prepared because he had been trained in Washington in the law department where they go back a hundred years to follow up a case and they will never start that case until every angle is absolutely covered. And that's why he became really a good lawyer, and every suit he had in Los Angeles he won. But then when Prohibition had been repealed I said, "You are killing yourself for a few pennies. You come in the wine business." He said, "All right, Papa," so there you have it. And he applies the same methods acquired in Washington. He's very stubborn. He gets an idea, you can't change him, which probably is hereditary.

Teiser: So he went with California Wine Association...when?



- Perelli-Minetti: It was toward the end of the '40's. He was assistant to Walter Taylor.
- Teiser: And then he became...
- Perelli-Minetti: He became general manager when Walter Taylor withdrew.\*
- Teiser: And has been since. Am I right in believing that since the middle '30's, the California Wine Association has been a cooperative?
- Perelli-Minetti: It has been; it still is. It still is a cooperative.
- Teiser: Is it a grower cooperative or a winemakers' cooperative?
- Perelli-Minetti: No, it's a sales agency for growers, strictly a grower sales agency. California Wine Association returns to the growers all the net received from the sale of the wine.\*\*
- Teiser: Where does the wine making function fit in then?
- Perelli-Minetti: The wine is made by the grower at his winery. He delivers to California Wine Association sound, merchantable wine. Otherwise California Wine Association will not accept it.

#### CALIFORNIA WINE ASSOCIATION AND OTHER COOPERATIVES

- Teiser: Has the California Wine Association taken any new direction since about 1950 or '51?
- Perelli-Minetti: It is hard to have a lot of growers approve a new idea. The grower is responsible for non-performance of California Wine Association. He will pay the fine for non-delivery.

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\*Walter E. Taylor resigned from the position of manager of California Wine Association (which was then operating as Fruit Industries, Ltd.) late in 1950. See footnote p. 76.

\*\*In December, 1970, the California Wine Association completed a reorganization from a cooperative to a California stock corporation and elected Antonio Perelli-Minetti president.



Perelli-Minetti: If the grape market was high, he would sell his grapes to the commercial organization in preference. That's been the failure of the wine co-ops in California. If the grape price were low and he a member of a cooperative, he would deliver all his grapes to it, so C.W.A. would be long on wine when prices were low and short when they were high. Many wine cooperatives are that way. The grower is his own enemy. For reasons of their own, especially small growers who could not wait for their money started to withdraw from their co-ops.

C.W.A. had eleven members\* at one time. That's where the Eleven Cellars label came in. A survey was made, spent \$20,000; I was opposed to it because we should have a better label than that. But anyway...

Teiser: When was that, about?

Perelli-Minetti: It was after Walter Taylor left and the C.W.A. did not have eleven members. The members that had withdrawn demanded payment of their revolving fund; quite a drain on C.W.A., left with a reduced number of members and reduced operating capital. Then all discarded caps, labels, showing [display] materials, etcetera, carried on the books as an asset of C.W.A. (many hundred of dollars) was written off, and shouldered by the remaining growers. That brought on the question of whether C.W.A. had to be liquidated in 1960.

I went to San Francisco, and at the meeting I said, "No, we don't liquidate." I convinced Lodi Winery, Jack Durrell not to liquidate. Cherokee and Delano Growers voted to liquidate. Delano Growers pulled out and Cherokee stayed in. C.W.A. had only five or six thousand tons of grapes by the three members when it needed 40,000 tons.

I said, "We'll supply the 40,000 tons." So the company picked up again. Now in the last eight years,

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\*The eleven members were Cherokee Vineyard Association, Community Grape Corporation, Cucamonga Growers Cooperative Winery, Delano Growers Cooperative Winery, Florin Winery Association, Lodi Winery, Inc., Mokelumne Winery, A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons, Rancho del Oso Winery, Sonoma Cooperative Winery, and the Woodbridge Vineyard Association.



Perelli-Minetti: whatever it is, nine years, we've been supplying 25,000, 40,000, 50,000, 60,000, 70,000 tons, all the needs of C.W.A. And if they need 100,000, we'll supply 100,000. So our revolving fund built up quickly. Now C.W.A. has refused applications for membership.

Teiser: How many members are there now?

Perelli-Minetti: There's only three. Lodi Winery wanted to sell, we bought all their inventory and revolving fund, Lodi maintaining their vote until the inventory was all sold. Now only three. Now Cherokee that voted in favor of liquidation are happy that they remained in. But the trouble with Cherokee is that its own growers prefer to pay the \$5 penalty and sell their best grapes to Gallo or somebody else, and so they kill their own co-op. Cherokee used to put 30,000 tons of grapes into C.W.A., now only puts 2,000 tons. So we've helped Cherokee by having them make some wine for C.W.A. on a fixed price. Practically, we've been supporting C.W.A., because we know it's a good company and the results have shown it.

Teiser: When you have such a small number of growers, does it still classify as a cooperative?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, yes, doesn't make any difference. It was a cooperative and it's still a cooperative, although you cannot organize a cooperative with less than five.

Teiser: Well, that's what I wondered, so...

Perelli-Minetti: But it's still a cooperative and the status of the cooperative cannot be changed, I presume. At one time I wanted to change A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons from a corporation to a cooperative, which a family could do. Even if they are members of the same family, they can join in a cooperative form. But then the Internal Revenue told me, we'll charge you 52 per cent on your profit because we consider this a subterfuge to get away from paying the taxes. I said, "It is a fact that that is one of the purposes." The cooperative doesn't pay tax, but the member that gets the money, he pays taxes, see. But the point was this: the Perelli-Minetti cooperative would not pay tax, but the members, the family, they would pay individual tax when distribution was made, and the savings would build the operating capital. I am sorry we didn't do it because if we had done it, we may not have had the trouble with



- Perelli-Minetti: Uncle Sam on the water. But we didn't anticipate then, as it was way before the canal was built. There was no talk even of building a canal then, but we felt that making a cooperative of the family would assure its security.
- Teiser: You were just operating from wells?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes.
- Teiser: At some point California Wine Association pulled out of the Wine Institute. Was that in connection with this whole reorganization?
- Perelli-Minetti: No. It was because of the policy of the Wine Institute. We withdrew before, because we didn't like the policy of the Wine Institute. They were all one-sided. They begged us to go back, but we are not going back because...
- Teiser: You're not?
- Perelli-Minetti: No. Until they change their policy. The Wine Institute should be impartial and should be for the wine industry and not to benefit a minority number. Now, that's the point. The issue is that.
- Teiser: I see. You feel that it favors some people?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes, because the one that pays the most is a dominating figure.
- Teiser: Did you feel that when it started it was a valid industry effort?
- Perelli-Minetti: It was. It was. I don't know if we were charter members, but we joined at the beginning of it.
- Teiser: I think you withdrew about the time there was some strife in the organization.
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. When politics enters into an organization of that type, that's the end of it. That was the same thing with C.W.A. There are politics in the management, among the growers, and that spells the end of a co-op. And then you have other cooperatives; they would induce growers to join them because Lodi is a limited area, and where most of the



Perelli-Minetti: cooperatives belonging to C.W.A. were located. There were many cooperatives before the Guild came in and induced growers to join them, to the loss of others, and then in many instances undersell to gain a market to the grower's loss.

Teiser: Has the total wine grape acreage increased since that time?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes, the acreage has increased tremendously.

Teiser: In the Lodi district, or...?

Perelli-Minetti: Not in the Lodi district.

Teiser: But in the Central Valley?

Perelli-Minetti: In the Central Valley. The growth has been from Tulare down. When I came here there were hardly any grapes planted. I built the first winery and the second winery here, and this is the third one I built in Delano. This district had relatively small acreage, but today I figure it produces about 250,000 tons if not more. And the planting is here.

Teiser: Do you think more land will be brought in in this area?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. More land, absolutely.

Teiser: So there's not going to be a shortage of vineyard land?

Perelli-Minetti: No. Even the Kern Land Company went into the vineyards. They have large vineyards. Setrakian has a thousand acres there, I think, or it may be a couple thousand. Lanza has a thousand acres or more at Kern Land Company. They won't sell the land. The renter plants the vineyard; after so many years, it reverts back to Kern Land Company.

Teiser: That's Kern County Land?

Perelli-Minetti: That is right. It was sold.\*

Teiser: Was it technically a cooperative?

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\*To Tenneco, Inc.



- Perelli-Minetti: Oh, no. Never was. That's commercial. Commercial that is run on a strict commercial basis, and they are very tough people, intelligent people.
- Teiser: Does Mr. Setrakian make wine?
- Perelli-Minetti: Oh, yes. Cal-Gro Winery.\*
- Teiser: Sells it in bulk?
- Perelli-Minetti: Mostly bulk. And then he makes a brandy too. He made a deal with Gallo, makes a brandy for Gallo under contract, because Gallo never made any brandy. I don't know the reason why, but... And at one time, Gallo wanted to buy C.W.A. mostly because of their brandy business. I was in favor of selling to him, not C.W.A., but the brandy business, but the children were opposed. Maybe it's for the best; I don't know.
- Teiser: Well, you have an entity to preserve, your family entity.
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes, but in the sale with Gallo, we would have been producing the brandy for Gallo. Instead of producing the brandy for C.W.A., we'd have produced it for Gallo., who would have furnished all capital for it. But now the way things are, we're practically C.W.A. Nominally, we are not because it's a co-op, and while we supply 90 per cent of the wine and brandy to C.W.A., we have only one vote against the two, which makes it tough.
- Teiser: Do the other two supply much of the dry wine?
- Perelli-Minetti: Very little. We crush Jack Durrell's requirement for him and deliver the wine to C.W.A. under his name, whatever the amount is.

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\*California Growers Wineries



## THE A. PERELLI-MINETTI &amp; SONS WINERY

Teiser: Are you producing table wines in this plant?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes, couple of million gallons. With the small exception of what is produced in Lodi at Cherokee, and Napa and Sonoma purchases, we produce all of it here.

Teiser: As we were walking around here yesterday, you were telling something of the background of this winery, and I should have brought my tape recorder along. Would you tell us the story of this winery again? I think you explained when we were taping yesterday the original buying of land and bringing it into production.\*

Perelli-Minetti: Well, at that time I split with Wallace, I always wanted to get by the railroad for its facilities, and the freeway. When I split with Wallace, I had to have a winery of my own. I felt that the association with Wallace could not go on. Wallace started to complain from the very beginning that I didn't know anything about the wine. I wanted to produce a continuity of business, establish a business on a permanent basis. So then I started to buy this land before I split with Wallace.

When I started buying this badlands it was very cheap, and with one idea first in mind: as industrial land, for industrial purposes. Because Delano is at the northern end of Kern County. Kern County has better tax facilities, more up-to-date and more push than Tulare County. And this, because of the railroad and freeway, made land valuable.

We have a ranch in Tulare County, just this side of Earlimart, where I first was going to put the winery. Then I figured I'd better come down here, because that was in Tulare County and I didn't like to go in Tulare County. That's when Wallace offered to put a winery on his place, claimed he had all kinds of money. Naturally, having no money, I figured it was a good opportunity. And when I figured the association with Wallace was doomed, I started buying this land. And then when we split, I had

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\*See pp. 65-67.



Perelli-Minetti: the land here, and started to build the winery. All the land was extremely alkali, but the refuse of the winery is acid and would in time naturalize all the alkali. Now this is the best land, rich land; it's practically free of alkali. And that's the way we built the winery here, between two towns on the highway and the railroad. We have a tunnel under the highway, goes clear to the other side, where we own a large vineyard and can send the winery water there.

Teiser: How many acres have you now?

Perelli-Minetti: Twenty five hundred.

Teiser: You added gradually?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: You mentioned your winery tanks.

Perelli-Minetti: Those tanks there, those are the first black iron bolted tanks that were constructed in California for the wine. Then Cella followed. Those are black iron, but now they are coated inside. Like Gallo's; Gallo's are all black iron. So are United Vintners'. Now those six big tanks over there, those are all stainless steel. Those two big ones, 200,000 gallons each, are stainless steel and used for brandy, where it's blended and then barreled as one batch. Our program is to have all stainless steel. Now these first two black iron tanks here have been coated; they were coated last year on an experimental basis for \$19,000. Because they are bolted, we just gambled. No guarantee that it would work, but we had to take the chance because we have several bolted black iron tanks.

Teiser: What kind of a coating is it?

Perelli-Minetti: It's epoxy. It was done by a man named Knowland. The difficulty is the bolts, and the rubber material, washers, and then the joints overlap. These tanks have been sprayed with a couple of inches of material. When sprayed on, the material puffs up, makes a perfect insulation, so that the tanks at the same time are insulated against high temperature. And then over that insulating material it's coated with epoxy. Because of that it makes a better binding and will not flake like it does on an iron tank, where the sun temperature reaches up to 160-170°.



- Perelli-Minetti: It makes the tank suitable for dry wine. But the floor, that's where we have to worry, because stepping on it will destroy the epoxy. So now we're going to have a different floor entirely, because most of our outside old cooerage are bolted tanks.
- Teiser: You said you were an early user of concrete tanks?
- Perelli-Minetti: The first concrete tanks here in California after Repeal, I think Cella built them. His brother-in-law was a builder, [Louis] Franceschi. But we built the first concrete tank for alcohol, by an Act of Congress.
- Teiser: When was that?
- Perelli-Minetti: Oh that was very early. This was in 1936, when we built the plant here.
- Teiser: And you put up just one building at first?
- Perelli-Minetti: The first building and the distillery at the same time, yes.
- Teiser: So you definitely decided on brandy immediately?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. First we needed a distillery to make sweet wine.
- Teiser: You didn't use it for brandy then at the beginning?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes, we made a brandy for C.W.A. We made brandy, and we made alcohol. From the same still we could produce both. The brandy distillery we built to make brandy for C.W.A. Before this was built, we made it at the Wallace plant. The label read, "Produced by A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons and bottled by Fruit Industries." We were getting free advertisement, so the other members killed that. Fruit Industries had to have a change of law in Washington before they could do that, but they did it. But then when we built this plant, we made a brandy for ourselves, too. We sold it in bulk.
- Teiser: Did you ever have a Perelli-Minetti label?
- Perelli-Minetti: No. We're liable to have one one of these days, but not yet. To put a label on the market is very costly, and we haven't the money to do it. The advertising, unless you put in so much money a case, you can't succeed easily.



Perelli-Minetti: We need the money for many other things. We have to have a million and a half dollars to build a bottling plant. We haven't got that type of money, but we're going to get it. We can borrow it. But we have to be cautious when we spend that type of money, because the five concrete brandy warehouses that alone cost over a million dollars have been built with borrowed money.

Teiser: You were showing us yesterday the way that you have changed your aging of brandy, the storage?

Perelli-Minetti: We saw at Hiram Walker barrels piled up on end.

Teiser: On end, with plywood between?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: Not racks.

Perelli-Minetti: Not racks. Hiram Walker made an experiment on how far the barrels underneath could stand. They concluded 20 barrels one on top of the other without cracking the barrels underneath was safe.

Teiser: What capacity are these barrels?

Perelli-Minetti: About 50 gallons. We age it at 125 proof, which experience has shown to be the best for results.

The warehouses contain close to 100,000 barrels. Some of those were scattered in different warehouses because C.W.A. did not have any, and the brandy age goes up to ten years. It is blended, processed, and reduced to 80 proof for bottling. Except A.R. Morrow label is bottled at 100 proof. But the processing of both brandies is the same.

Teiser: You said that the cost of the racks...

Perelli-Minetti: ...is more than the cost of the building. And not only that, but when you stack up barrels on end, you get about 25 per cent more space. Therefore the cost of the building per barrel is cheaper.

Teiser: What year did the government finally give you permission to use that technique?

Perelli-Minetti: Last year. For two years before, we had a small amount of



Perelli-Minetti: barrels stacked up for which we were getting hell from the government, but we just took the hell and held the stack in place. Fortunately, and I say that with a great deal of pride, I think we have one of the best standings with the government, as far as the alcohol department, of any winery in California. Because we have never done anything outside of the law.

Teiser: Perhaps they respect a plant that's clearly well maintained.

Perelli-Minetti: That isn't so much the plant the way it's maintained; it is the operations that are strictly carried out within the law.

Teiser: I think one of the other pioneering techniques that you've used, that was mentioned when we were walking around, was the Rietz disintegrator?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. That was in 1951.

Teiser: How did you happen to try it?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, Mr. [Carl A.] Rietz came in.

Teiser: He was a very persuasive man; I remember him.

Perelli-Minetti: I said, "Let's try it." So we took a few boxes of grapes and went to his place, in Oakland, I think. That time only Emperor grapes were available. The juice of the Emperor is white, the old-fashioned crush. With the Rietz, it's pink, like rosé wine, because its color is extracted from the skins. So we figured that would be an advantage with the black grapes, the way it extracted the color, a beautiful performance, so we ordered then and there a Rietz disintegrator.

At that time we had purchased two Valley Foundry disintegrators, different from the Rietz. The crushers, such as we know them, throw out some juice, skins, pulp and every raisin that came with the grapes--which, even figured at a dollar less per ton, would amount to a loss of \$30,000, as we crushed 30,000 tons of grapes. The year we put in the Rietz we sold for \$1,200 the two first Valley disintegrators that cost \$15,000. Considering the savings with the Rietz, we still saved \$15,000 the first year we put the Rietz in.



Perelli-Minetti: Then we worked out a deal and a contract with Rietz whereby for any machine sold in California to the wineries we would split the profit. Some wineries that purchased the Rietz did not use them the way we did. Rietz refused to split the profit on the sale of his machine. I said, "What the hell; we are not in the business of selling machines."

During the years of operation we learned many things about the Rietz as the most convenient way for a determinate purpose, and while better than the old crushers, we still had a problem of separating the stems in order to put through the still the residues without being forced to use the screens that reduced the grapes to fine pulp.

Then Valley Foundry came with a new disintegrator of which we now have three, two in operation and one as a standby. It makes an ideal combination, produces no losses, and permits the still to operate for a month or so without being forced to clean it every other day, as we had to do before we installed the new Valley disintegrators. When you consider that the daily capacity of the winery is practically predicated on the capacity of the stills, it is easy to appreciate the benefits by the use of the Rietz as we use it now, just as a crusher, and Valley for removing every stem filament from the crushed grapes. Besides the alcohol still, we have a brandy still with a capacity of 500 barrels per day.

Teiser: Have you worked out any other new techniques?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, I don't know what you could say. You mean referring to the intake of the grapes, or in the total operation?

Teiser: Any aspect of it.

Perelli-Minetti: Well, we operate differently from other wineries. As soon as the crushed grapes reach the tank we start draining the juice, which increases the capacity of the tank by the juice that is removed. In a tank that has a capacity of 800 tons we crush almost 2,000 tons, because as the grapes are crushed the juice is drained practically at the same time.

There is a great deal of improvement we visualize, but haven't got the money and must be cautious on expenditures, because we could spend here \$3,000,000. Let



Perelli-Minetti: me say this, that whenever we can see a dollar saving in operation by spending two dollars initially, we do so if we have the money, because that expenditure which takes place only once produces every year thereafter a saving that returns handsome profit. We have always felt that way. But when it takes too long a time to return the investment, we refrain from doing it.

Now when we crushed a small tonnage, we used to freeze all the juice. It would ferment completely in about fifteen days absolutely unattended. It produced better wine, and higher alcohol, because by the time all the sugar was fermented out the temperature barely reached 70°. It would take too many tanks to do it now when you consider that at present fermentation is accomplished in two or three days, besides the cooling machines. Money--always money. It costs money to watch and control temperature now twice a day, and samples must be brought to the laboratory. That throws us back to the old-fashioned way of doing it. But one of these days, we have to do it. Now we finish and stabilize the wines that before C.W.A. did, and we had to make great expenditures, because C.W.A. requested each member to finish its own wines.

Teiser: Oh, then you gave up the Minnesota Street plant in San Francisco?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, and the Guasti plant. Most of the wines were finished in both places. Now the wines are finished by the member winery. You can easily figure what it has meant for A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons, that contributed 90 per cent of C.W.A. wines. Demands for filters, demands for refrigeration, demands for pasteurization, all types of equipment that go into the finishing, although we seldom pasteurize the wines. The new filter alone cost us \$17,000. And the new big plant we bought last year.

Teiser: What plant was it?

Perelli-Minetti: The refrigeration plant. Before, we were always behind supplying the wine to C.W.A. and its bulk sales customers. Now we can supply the wine as fast as C.W.A. calls for it. But we are short of cooperage. We make a blend, fill up a tank, and until that blend is all shipped, that tank is frozen so to speak, even if it contains 4,000 or 10,000 gallons and its capacity is actually 180,000. When many



Perelli-Minetti: of the tanks are so frozen, it makes it hard to operate during the vintage. We're figuring how to put in a million gallons additional, at a cost of \$250,000, and also a bottling plant.\*

Then brandy. We have 900,000 gallons of stainless steel and glass-lined tanks to receive and store the brandy as it is produced, which is faster than we can barrel. Barreling is done as we dump brandy for the bottling. Otherwise we would have to buy barrels and build additional warehouse space. This way, by keeping the brandy in the big tanks, as we empty the barrels we refill them. Now we can make blends of up to 180,000 gallons and fill the barrels and stack them up some 2,600 barrels in each stack. One blend. It is cheaper to operate that way than before with batches of 150 barrels only, scattered all over the five warehouses. There is a saving too as the barrels are refilled before they dry up. Although it isn't much, it's always a couple of dollars. Those are the things, the little things, that sink or keep the ship afloat.

As time goes on--we expect to do away with all the wooden racks and use the space for barrels stacked on end only.

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\*A new 300 by 430 foot building having bottling lines and storage area was completed in autumn, 1971.



(Interview #4 - At San Francisco - May 28, 1969)

GIUSEPPE PERELLI-MINETTI

Teiser: These subjects are not in order. They came to me as I listened to the other tapes, so I'll just ask questions and skip around as necessary. Your daughter Jean told us that you had a story about your father trying to corner the wine market in Italy.

Perelli-Minetti: My father with Francesco Cino, inventor of the tank cars for wine, and others had cornered the grape market for shipment to France, in the expectation the treaty would be renewed, which had been in force in consequence of the havoc of phylloxera that destroyed all the vineyards of France. The group had contracted all the grapes for sale to France, and naturally to Italy too. But in fact the treaty was not renewed. The group lost millions. It broke many.

Cino was the inventor of the tank car, that supplied the country with the transportation of wine, and I believe my father had some connection there.

Teiser: In Italy?

Perelli-Minetti: Italy. When my father returned home after he fought the war of independence with Garibaldi...

Teiser: He fought with Garibaldi?

Perelli-Minetti: He ran away from home when he was 14.

Teiser: My word--everybody in your family ran away from home!

Perelli-Minetti: It seems that way.



Teiser: How long was he with Garibaldi?

Perelli-Minetti: It must have been six years, at the least, or eight. Garibaldi's army was disbanded after Rome was taken, and my father came home.

In those days transportation was very bad. I think my father was the first man, so he used to tell me, to take grapes from the Romagna Province (Bologna is the center) and with oxen drive open carts all the way to Milano.

Then he patented collapsible boxes--and containers to transport wine, crushed grapes and water, of the same material as the bags that are carried on the front of cars with water.

Teiser: Those bags that cool by evaporation?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. My father had patented that. I'll send you a letter-head where he shows all the things.\* When the war with Abyssinia took place, my father furnished the Italian government with bags for the mules and for the soldiers. Italy lost the war, and we never were paid. If the government had to pay us at today's rate what they owed then with interest, there wouldn't be enough money in Italy to pay us.

Teiser: Your father's financial reverses then--

Perelli-Minetti: Financial reverses started as the result of having joined the group that tried to corner the grapes with the assurance that the treaty would be renewed with France. Now the group cornered the market and had to resell the grapes at heavy losses in Italy. That's why many went broke. The entry to France was blocked; the treaty was not renewed, so they were left with all the grapes to sell.

Teiser: What year was that?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, I believe 1880.

Teiser: That was not connected with his coming to the United States?

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\*See Appendix.



Perelli-Minetti: No. Oh, that was long before.

Teiser: How did he happen to come here?

Perelli-Minetti: He came on a visit and we wouldn't let him go back.

Teiser: Why not?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, he was alone, and the family and all the children were here and we thought this was the place for him.

Teiser: I see--personal.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Keep the family together. There were six children, and the six of us were in California.

Teiser: Had he by then sold...

Perelli-Minetti: He had disposed of everything.

#### EARLY LEADERS OF ITALIAN SWISS COLONY

Teiser: You were speaking of Mr. P.C. Rossi. These were the men that you had lunch with when you first came here: Mr. Rossi, Mr. Sbarboro...

Perelli-Minetti: As I remember, Mr. P.C. Rossi and Mr. Andrea Sbarboro were the active leaders of Italian Swiss Colony, and Mr. Fontana was a big stockholder, dedicated to the canning industry.\*

Teiser: You made some mention earlier of Mr. Rossi and described him a little, but would you characterize him?

Perelli-Minetti: It is hard, but to me he was a wonderful man, dynamic, very handsome, very polished, big man. A man who would impress you. Had a little beard. Do you know who his wife was?

Teiser: No.

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\*See pp. 10-11.



Perelli-Minetti: She was a Catholic, with a Genovese mother. I was told Mr. Rossi had joined the Masons, so he had to give up the Masonry to marry her. Mrs. Rossi's family had a chemical store on Market Street. I have forgotten the name. And they owned Santa Cruz Island.\* They had a winery there, and they made there beautiful wine. God! what wine!

Teiser: Did they grow grapes on the island?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes; beautiful!

Teiser: I never heard of that.

Perelli-Minetti: Well, so you are learning something new.

Teiser: I am learning something constantly from you!

Perelli-Minetti: P.C. Rossi's children sold the island. I met the new owner through our bank because he was considering replanting the grapes, and fixing up the cooperage, and making wine. He made a million selling axles to Ford, but I don't know what he paid for the island. Then he sold the casks and everything else. He didn't go into making wine.

There were 14 children in the Rossi family, just three boys, including Carlo,\*\* the youngest of the family. He joined the Jesuits, in punishment he was sent to Brazil because he had ultra modern ideas. He used to sell chemicals for Stauffer Chemical Company, and he used to come to Delano. We always had lunch together when he came to Delano. One day he said to me, "Well, this is my last time because I'm getting married." Then all of a sudden the marriage didn't take place.

The girls, I think only two are married. Most of the rest are all in the convents. Albina I think got married. Esther never married; she's the oldest one of the sisters.\*\*\*

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\*Justinian Caire. The island is one of the Santa Barbara Channel Islands.

\*\*P. Carlo Rossi.

\*\*\*She died March 29, 1968.



Perelli-Minetti: Oh, a handsome girl, beautiful woman. The first one, Maria, married an attorney, [Ambrose] Gherini. She had some children. They went to Stanford; I think one of the girls at the same time one of my girls was there.

Teiser: Was Mr. P.C. Rossi a domineering sort of man?

Perelli-Minetti: In business? Or in the family?

Teiser: Either.

Perelli-Minetti: I think in the family he was not. Oh, he was a very kind man, even in business. I mean, with his help he was a very kind man. As far as I am concerned, he was very kind and very generous. Oh I didn't agree when he told me that they were not paying the same to the Italians as the Americans,\* but I didn't take into consideration that that weigh master was a temporary job for three months and we were steady. But you know, the way Mr. Rossi put it, I didn't like it. I mean, you can say something...

Teiser: Well, I gather Mr. Rossi wasn't used to saying things wrong.

Perelli-Minetti: He was strict because you have to be strict in business, but as far as I'm concerned he was very, very generous, very mild. I never heard him talk loud to a man. He would call him and say, "You are doing this wrong; you should do it different because..."

I remember one time they had two tanks for sherry, made out of oak. The tanks had been idle the year probably, and when the wine was being pumped in them, you couldn't stop it from leaking on the floor. And Mr. Rossi came over there and he was pretty excited, but he wasn't rough at all with the men, and I was one of them. Anybody else might have just taken a stave and... But he didn't do it. He said, "You shouldn't have put the wine in." I said, "I had order to pump the wine regardless."

Everybody in the Asti Colony\*\* liked him; there was no question about it.

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\*See p. 20.

\*\*Italian Swiss Colony at Asti.



Teiser: Someone mentioned that at Asti now, the land around the winery isn't very good, gives low yields.

Perelli-Minetti: Most of the land was never any good; it produced very little.

During Prohibition, California Wine Association started selling all their wineries. We were offered Italian Swiss Colony, the winery and the land, for \$115,000. We wouldn't take it. We wouldn't buy it because it's a big lemon. Now, originally they had about 1,500-2,000 acres. If you produced an average of half a ton to the acre, it was pretty good. In the early days, trainloads of manure were shipped from San Francisco where all the drayage was done by horses. The American Express and other drayage companies had tremendous stables, supervised by a veterinary. All its manure went to Asti and was spread over the land, but the only fertile, productive land was that by the river and Chianti.

Teiser: How would you characterize Andrea Sbarboro?

Perelli-Minetti: He was a very forceful man. He made three trips to Washington to plead against Prohibition. Published quite a number of pamphlets showing why Prohibition shouldn't affect dry wine. And he was right. Table wine is food. But you know, the way the Protestant churches helped to enact Prohibition. The churches are responsible for closing the red light districts here [San Francisco], which whether you like it or not, are a necessity, especially in a seaport in country like this where many people don't speak English. There never was a rape in the history of San Francisco. I think one time an attempt was made and the fellow quietly hung that same day.

I was very friendly with a police captain because he used to come up to Pop Macray. In those days the summer resorts were reached by train and stages. Arrangement for the two week stay of your vacation had to be made one year ahead. Pop Macray was the other side of Cloverdale. And the place of interest for Pop Macray to take the customers in a stage was to Asti. I used to show them through the winery, that is how I became very friendly with this captain. When the law that closed the red light was passed--I think it went in effect in the month of July, I don't remember the year--\*



Teiser: The Red Light Abatement Act, it was called.

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. During the month of August in the Bay area there were 112 rapes, mostly of children. And since then it has gone up and gone up and gone up, and today a girl never knows when she is safe, not even in her home. You can't stop prostitution. It's one of the things that nobody can cope with. And not only that, but the other effect; you had less divorces then than now. When a married man wasn't satisfied at home, you know, he'd just go there, satisfy himself, go home, and everything was okay. Family was more united. But now, what happens?

Of course, in those days, the women didn't work. Very few women. I mean the office workers were all men. Very few offices had women secretaries. P.C. Rossi had one. But World War I made the change. But naturally when a woman works and finds herself in many cases superior to the man and earns more money, belittles the man, and well, the man says, "What the--just as well get out."

Teiser: Mr. Sbarboro, was he actively involved in the winery?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes. He was secretary of the company. He was president of the Italian-American Bank.

Teiser: Did he spend much time up at Asti?

Perelli-Minetti: He came up every weekend with Mr. Rossi. As a matter of fact, he built a home there. That house by the river, Mr. Sbarboro built that.

Teiser: Who were the other people up there who were principals in it?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, Dr. [Paolo] de Vecchi. His daughter is still alive. He had one daughter. I think she lives in New York.

Teiser: What was his function?

Perelli-Minetti: I don't think he was very active, but he was a shareholder. He was a young doctor. I think he married a Follis\* girl.

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\*Margaret Follis. They also had two sons.



Perelli-Minetti: She had some ailment and had been taken all over the world and couldn't find what it was. And it just was a simple thing. They said, "All right you have cured her, now you marry her." He married her and got millions besides.

Teiser: I think you mentioned Mr. Enrico Prati.

Perelli-Minetti: He came in after I left, years after.

Teiser: Did you know him?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, very well. He was a good administrator. He took charge of the whole company. He married one of the Seghesio girls. Then I think Seghesio bought part of Italian Swiss Colony. That was the Chianti property which adjoined his, about four or five miles south of Asti. I think when Allegrini died, I had already left. So Prati came after Allegrini died. He was a good manager, no question about that. His son married the Rolandi girl. [F.S.] Rolandi, the one who built the Stockton tunnel.\* Prati had a boy and a girl. The mother is still living, the Seghesio girl.

Teiser: You mentioned Mr. Sophus Federspiel.

Perelli-Minetti: He was the general manager for Italian Swiss Colony.

Teiser: What sort of man was he?

Perelli-Minetti: He was a very forceful man. He was a German, you know.

Teiser: Was he born in Germany?

Perelli-Minetti: I don't think so.

Teiser: German character though?

Perelli-Minetti: German character.

Teiser: Was he a good wine man?

Perelli-Minetti: I did not think so at that time, but he was a good administrator.

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\*The Stockton Street tunnel in San Francisco.



Teiser: Did he understand the wine business?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, yes, from top to bottom. Had to. After Italian Swiss Colony was taken over by C.W.A., Mr. Federspiel joined in with Lanza. Then Prohibition came. He joined in with Lanza, and they joined Fruit Industries. Then they withdrew and Mr. Federspiel went in business by himself.\*

Teiser: Why did they go out of Fruit Industries?

Perelli-Minetti: Like anything else, you join something hoping that that is the best thing you can do. But after you get in, then possibly you feel that you can do better by yourself and you leave. That's what happened. Things in Fruit Industries weren't what they should have been; there's no question about that.

#### EARLY LEADERS IN FRUIT INDUSTRIES

Teiser: Someone said that Garrett and Guasti held over half interest in Fruit Industries.

Perelli-Minetti: No, that is wrong. Fruit Industries was a co-op, a sales cooperative. Everybody had one vote. Each member had one director and one vote. Now Garrett dominated by the force of personality and because they had the sales. [Paul] Garrett was a tremendous salesman. He had the best sales force in the United States in the wine business in those days. He produced Virginia Dare. They had a big plant in Brooklyn. But then they withdrew. Guasti had a large interest in one way, but not the largest, because when it comes to quantity, some of the other cooperatives like Cherokee and Community delivered the product of more grapes to Fruit Industries than Guasti. Guasti was limited to their own production, 15,000, 16,000 tons, while Cherokee used to deliver the wine of some 30,000 tons or more.

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\*Sophus Federspiel was with Italian Swiss Colony from 1889 to 1916. He joined H.O. Lanza in Colonial Grape Products in 1920. In 1935 there was a separation of interests.



Teiser: So they had a bigger stake in it?

Perelli-Minetti: They had a bigger stake. After Garrett withdrew, Guasti dominated, because Guasti was a powerful company. They had money, while the growers didn't have any. So the growers just went along, and that's the point.

Teiser: What was Paul Garrett like personally?

Perelli-Minetti: Very dominating figure. He would get up, write a letter at two o'clock in the morning. He'd say that his best ideas came at three o'clock in the morning when he was in his twilight sleep. And he wrote a letter insulting a Mr. Rogers, who was an attorney, had a big winery in Fresno. Then he repented because Mr. Rogers sued him for libel, and he had to pay heavily.

Mr. Garrett bought the Tarpey winery for \$80,000 after Prohibition. He overlooked the drainage of the winery. So after the first vintage, Tarpey told him he could not drain into their creek because it would spoil their vineyard. He got so mad that he sold back to Tarpey the plant for \$5,000. So there you have the type of man he was. If he could fight, he'd fight. If he couldn't fight, he'd just give up and walk out, to avoid going crazy. He had a tremendous temper. He would say, "I don't know anything about wine, don't know anything about anything. Hell, I just sell, and for what I don't know I hire a man to do the job for me, and that's all." Well, he knew a hell of a lot about wine, of course, because you can't be a good salesman without knowing the product.

#### THE GUASTI VINEYARDS

Teiser: You told us a story about the time you went down to the Guasti vineyards...

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, I was a consultant.

Teiser: Could you tell it again, so we could put it on the tape?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, when we formed Fruit Industries, at that time the meetings were held in Guasti headquarters in Los Angeles,



Perelli-Minetti: although [Walter E.] Taylor operated in San Francisco. But the official headquarters were in Los Angeles, and every month we met there. One time young Guasti asked me if I would take a look at the vineyards as their yield was very low, to which I agreed.

Teiser: This is Secondo Guasti, Junior? Was this after the death of Secondo, Senior?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, quite many years after his father's death. While Guasti II was president and largest stockholder of the company, [James A.] Barlotti was actually the power behind the throne. Guasti was a nice young man, but his mother wanted him to be at the plant at eight o'clock. He had married a rich girl. The wife kept him out 'til two o'clock in the morning. Well, he died when he was 42. Her name was Orcutt. Her father was president of the Union Oil Company of Los Angeles.\*

Teiser: So Guasti asked you to help him?

Perelli-Minetti: To take a look after the vineyard. And I used to go there a couple of times a month, go on Saturday and get away on Monday. Then at the request of Guasti and Barlotti I bought some shares in the company so I could have a voice at the company meetings, because they were having lots of trouble in the company. Guasti was the majority stockholder and the minority stockholders would always fight, as they didn't think it was run right. At that time the company had decided to sell. I had the money to buy it; that is, the bank would finance it. But then I decided not to. And so I let Lanza buy it.

Teiser: Was there a company named Post and Klusman that leased it for a time there?

Perelli-Minetti: Post? Oh, no. Colonel [Morton] Post had a winery and a large vineyard facing the Foothill Blvd. My brother Julius, Scatena, and Lawson were operating the vineyard and the winery and had an option to buy it. And at the last minute they did not, which was a terrible mistake. And Garrett bought it.\*\* Philo Biane's father was the superintendent

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\*W.W. Orcutt. See also p. 73.

\*\*Just before Prohibition.



Perelli-Minetti: before Garrett joined Fruit Industries.\*

Teiser: I see. So that wasn't part of the Guasti holdings.

Perelli-Minetti: No, no. no.

Teiser: You told about correcting wind damage for the Guasti vineyard by cutting down trees?

Perelli-Minetti: No, no, I didn't say correcting any damage, but eliminating the cause of the damage. The land there is so circumvented by big trees to hold the wind back. And during the years the sand accumulated, and the vines would be covered up by sand. Consequently it would take 50 people to do the pruning, and 150 people to uncover the vines. When I went down there, by chance there was a horrible sand storm that took the paint off the side of the car. I took a blanket, put it over me, and went behind the church by the railroad track. And I sat there. And I noticed that the sand would hit the trees and fall down. I said to myself, if the trees weren't there the sand would go straight on. To convince Guasti and Barlotti to take those trees down was something to remember. The eucalyptus were 100 feet high, had been there for, I don't know, 70 years, 80 years. I had that row of trees taken down, and this big sand hill in one year was cleared out.

The vines had trunks 15 or more feet, which had to be cut down. This was caused by the sand falling down as it covered the vines, and every year more and more the sand piled up. The vines' crown was a couple of feet above the ground. Guasti complained about the damage the sand did, as it cut to pieces the grapes up to a certain height, with big losses. I said to myself, "There is something wrong here." I went into the vineyard when the wind was blowing. I marked the vines where the most damage would take place, and I noticed that the grapes that were below two feet off the ground would be destroyed; the ones that were above were not touched. So I raised all the vines so the grapes would be above the damage line, and

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\*See also Philo Biane, Wine Making in Southern California and Recollections of Fruit Industries, Inc., a Regional Oral History Office interview in this series completed in 1972.



Perelli-Minetti: for the first time they had 17,000 tons of grapes. That was the first time in their history.

Teiser: So you built up a good property for Mr. Lanza to buy.

Perelli-Minetti: Well, evidently. He sold it quickly. The war came, and you know what that meant. Probably if I had bought it, I might have put the grapes into Fruit Industries and lost the opportunity Lanza had, because anyone that bought wine from him had to buy shares at \$1,500, over twice the price Lanza paid for the shares.

Teiser: Is that good land down there?

Perelli-Minetti: No. It's just sand mostly.

Teiser: But you can grow grapes in it?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, you can grow grapes on top of a...In Italy, we used to buy grapes in many districts. In one district called the Mattina (means morning) there on top of the mountain is a big stone flat where only a blade of grass would be visible in the cracks.

A man from whom we would buy the grapes had the idea that if he blasted holes in that flat, he might raise grapes. So, unknown to anybody, he did just that. A few holes, a load of dirt, and cuttings. Well, the cuttings prospered. He had six or seven children and he went to the city hall, and he said, "I am a poor man, why don't you give me that rock flat up there?" So they laughed at him saying, "What are you going to do with it?" The man said, "You know, I could bring the rocks down and sell them." And so they gave him all that area, maybe 100 acres or more. He dug the holes and by the river with burros, he and the sons loaded a couple of sacks of sand on each burro, and would go up there. In time he had the best vineyard in that country, made the best wine, and he got the best price and became a millionaire. So you see, if you are observing...

And that's what Guasti did there. He planted a few grapevines that nobody knew about. After he was convinced of the results he bought a large tract, and organized the Italian Vineyard Company. Somewhat on the order of the Italian Swiss Colony.



Perelli-Minetti: An Italian, Alfredo Beccaro, whose family is a big wine merchant in Italy, had dinner at Mario's house in Hillsborough. He said they have a winery in Venezuela, and they planted a hundred acres of grapes. They're getting three crops a year, but cut off one crop at the very beginning to help the vines. Now they've bought 4,000 acres more. Next year when I come back from my vacation I want to go down there and see the place.

Teiser: Has anyone ever got more than one crop a year in California?

Perelli-Minetti: Grapes? Zinfandel, you get the first crop and second crop. But that's a peculiarity of the vine, but not two crops as we would understand it.

Teiser: Do you get light yield when you have several crops?

Perelli-Minetti: The yield, according to Mr. Beccaro, is heavy. Some vine varieties, if frosted, will produce a second crop almost as good as the first.

#### FRUIT INDUSTRIES AFFAIRS (CONTINUED)

Teiser: Another person you mentioned, who I think was a member of Fruit Industries, was Frank Giannini of Tulare.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: Was he an important wine man?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, he was quite important. He had a winery for many years.

Teiser: Was he a big grower?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes, big grower.

Teiser: And winemaker too?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, and very wealthy.



- Teiser: I think somebody told me that he tended to go to sleep in the middle of Fruit Industries meetings.
- Perelli-Minetti: Well, he would. He was around 80. He looked like Napoleon. And he used to tell me his grandmother was a servant of Napoleon when he was a prisoner in Elba Island. And he came from Elba.
- Teiser: Maybe he had reason to look like Napoleon.
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right. He was smart. Tremendous worker. He had married one of the Lagomarsino children from Sacramento, the seed people. And his daughter married a Lagomarsino; they were cousins--Fred Lagomarsino. And now there is a Frank Lagomarsino. He has also interest in the grapes and wine. Nice young fellow.
- Teiser: Runs in families, wine and grapes in California...
- Perelli-Minetti: It's a pleasant occupation because it's diversified. It isn't like making a piece of machinery, every day the same. Would drive me crazy. Things change every day. You're dealing with nature. It's a challenge. You're fighting, sometimes, nature. Nature fighting you, and you have to do the best you can to survive. It's a continuous battle because you don't know 'til the grapes are gathered and delivered to the winery, and after that you don't know how you're going to sell the product and try to get your money out [laughing]. So until you've got the money back into your pocket, you don't know how you came out. But I like that. I could have made money in stock, and I don't care for that. I had some stock in the Bank of Italy, and then A.P. Giannini told me, "Don't sell it." I kept it, and then I gave it away for \$2 a share.
- Teiser: That must have been right in the Depression.
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes.
- Teiser: Another matter that we were discussing:\* when you separated from Mario Tribuno in California Grape Products, how did you make that separation?
- Perelli-Minetti: I took my share out, whatever was coming to me. He kept

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\*See p. 62.



Perelli-Minetti: the company. But we remained friends, just the same. As a matter of fact, when he sold the company and went into vermouth, during the war he couldn't get wine from any place, he came to me and I made the wine for him. And we've been making wine ever since.\*

Teiser: I realize that it had been a friendly separation.

Perelli-Minetti: Oh yes; because we didn't see eye to eye about Fruit Industries, and he was a thousand miles away, and you know, he couldn't see the things that I could see here.

Teiser: What sort of things?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, in the directorship and in a certain resolution that he was opposed to it and I was in favor, because he couldn't see it the way I saw it. So there you are.

Teiser: And you had only one vote between you for the company?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. He wanted me to vote one way and I would vote the other way. That's where the friction came in.

Teiser: This question goes back to the California Vineyardists Association, that Conn organization that you discussed--

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, Donald Conn.

Teiser: It seems to me that when he came here, which was in about 1927, people thought that he was representing Hoover. Was it your impression that he was speaking for Mr. Hoover?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: Mr. Hoover wasn't elected then, he didn't take office 'til '28.

Perelli-Minetti: Hoover came in in '28, yes. But arrangements had been made with Hoover before he was elected that if he was elected he would see that something was done about the grapes.

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\*For his son John (Jack) Tribuno.



Perelli-Minetti: That's a fact.\* And we were in Washington for about three months, Garrett, Italian Vineyard Company, Di Giorgio, and many other people interested in the grape business. We had been promised \$5,000,000 and we didn't get it. We got a million dollars loan but actually \$900,000 instead. Mrs. Willebrandt received \$100,000 out of it.

Teiser: What year was that?

Perelli-Minetti: When Alfred Smith ran. What year was that?

Teiser: Nineteen twenty-eight was the election year.

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. 1928.

Teiser: And that's the year you got the money?

Perelli-Minetti: No, we didn't get the money that year, we got it later. I think we got the money in 1931.

Teiser: But what year were you in Washington doing the arranging?

Perelli-Minetti: 1929.

Teiser: Just after Hoover was in?

Perelli-Minetti: Hoover was in already. But naturally Hoover's name was never mentioned, and we were strictly told not to--that we were doing the work for ourselves, for the benefit of the growers. Hoover knew all about what was going on, because it had been arranged before.

Teiser: Was the money that you were in Washington to get, was that to be given by the Federal Farm Board?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: And did you go as an organized group?

Perelli-Minetti: We were to organize Fruit Industries.

Teiser: Who were you representing in Washington?

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\*See also p. 69.



- Perelli-Minetti: We were there representing California Grape Products Company, which was our company; Tribuno, you know.
- Teiser: And each of the individuals there was representing his own company?
- Perelli-Minetti: In a way. All stated they would join Fruit Industries.
- Teiser: You were never active in the California Vineyardists Association?
- Perelli-Minetti: No.
- Teiser: Somebody told me that the California Vineyardists Association was behind the formation of Fruit Industries.
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Donald Conn was a promoter for his own pocketbook.\* Although his father was a multi-millionaire--his father was one of the executives of General Motors, I think, and during the Depression, he lost some \$20,000,000 in stock. He used to live here. He had retired already. Fruit Industries had to pay him \$70,000 to get him out. He would spend more money than... A very poor business manager. He was a wonderful promoter, nice personality, a magnetic personality, and a good speaker, and he might induce a man to commit suicide [laughter], but that's all he could do.
- Teiser: But there was a connection between his California Vineyardists Association and Fruit Industries?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right.
- Teiser: What was the connection?
- Perelli-Minetti: Well, the connection was that he promoted Fruit Industries and became some sort of manager under contract. Five years, I believe.
- Teiser: I see. Did all the members of the California Vineyardists Association, all these little growers, then sell their grapes to the wineries in Fruit Industries? Was there any formal connection?
- Perelli-Minetti: That would be impossible for me to say because...
- Teiser: There was no formal agreement?

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\*See also pp. 68-69. For additional discussion of Conn and Fruit Industries, see other Regional Oral History Office interviews in this series, including those of Leon D. Adams, Philo Biane and Horace O. Lanza.



Perelli-Minetti: No, no, no. But a great many of those from the different co-ops in Lodi, in Fresno, and in many other parts, who had joined...

Teiser: ...then joined Fruit Industries?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. Fruit Industries was a sales organization, sales of product the members would produce. Now Garrett, our company, Lanza, Italian Vineyard, were commercial organizations; the rest were all co-ops. But we joined. That's why each one had one vote. First we tried to put the vote on the tonnage, so that if you had more tons, you had more votes; say one vote for each ton, or for ten or a hundred tons. But then that would have given the control to only two or three people. And there were small co-ops like the two in Florin, and five or six in Lodi.

Teiser: Cucamonga at Ontario?

Perelli-Minetti: Cucamonga at Ontario, yes.\*

Teiser: And the Sonoma County Cooperative?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: There was the Mokelumne Winery.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: Where was that?

Perelli-Minetti: That was in Lodi.

Teiser: So that Fruit Industries represented finally a great many growers?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, it represented 1,500-1,600 growers. The members of the various organizations represented more than 1,500 growers.

Teiser: There were only nine original members, and then others came in?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. We needed members to enlarge the company and get control of the market. Which we had at one time,

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\*Cucamonga Growers Cooperative



Perelli-Minetti: but as I said before, things didn't pan out that way.

Teiser: The money that finally came to you, was it a government loan?

Perelli-Minetti: It was a direct loan, with heavy interest too, to Fruit Industries.

Teiser: It came to Fruit Industries as an organization then?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. The loan was made to Fruit Industries on facilities, and Fruit Industries had to mortgage the facilities that belonged to Fruit Industries.

It was paid off in oh, after the second war, from the revolving fund. It was a struggle to pay it off. During the war, the growers were so short-sighted. I fought. Fruit Industries would retain one and a half cents, two cents a gallon for the revolving fund, and Fruit Industries, like any cooperative, was handicapped for operating capital. Now we were borrowing money from the Farm Board, from the Federal Bank of Co-ops. They dictate to you a certain extent, and the loan is always short of what you need. So I said, "Now, we're getting money that wasn't expected when we were getting 25-27¢ a gallon return for the wine. We are now getting \$1.25 - \$1.50 a gallon, during the war. Why don't we retain 25¢ for the revolving fund, make a fund of five or six million dollars, then we don't have to pay interest to the bank, and that's all profit that we make." But oh no, the small grower wanted the money. So we couldn't do it.

Teiser: Mabel Walker Willebrandt was general counsel for Fruit Industries, was she not?

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: I know she was a very well-known woman.

Perelli-Minetti: She was a smart woman. She was a smart politician. I personally didn't like her.

Teiser: Did she represent Fruit Industries ably?

Perelli-Minetti: [pause] Yes. And no. Depended on which side you were on. And that's why I didn't like her. We had quite some extreme



Perelli-Minetti: arguments. One time I think she got peeved 'til she almost insulted me. They had gone into a meeting, Mrs. Willebrandt and two or three of the directors, to write a resolution regarding some change in Fruit Industries. They came in with a sentence. I think it was four lines. The rest of the directors were waiting for the resolution and everybody approved it. I said, "Wait a minute, Mrs. Willebrandt, if I take this comma from here, and I put it over here, what becomes of it?" She pulled the paper away from me and said, "You s.b...."

And that changed it completely, stopped what they were trying to do to Fruit Industries. And I'm surprised that Barlotti didn't see it because Barlotti was on the committee to draft the resolution. So you had to be there when they were talking to figure out, how do I get out here? Which way do I swing? I swung what was more interesting to me. I didn't give a damn what happened to the other. I wanted to keep Fruit Industries as long as I could stay in and make money.

I was helped quite a bit by Fruit Industries in this: that when Muscat Co-operative Winery Association went out, Fruit Industries was not in a position to operate without Muscat. I said, "I'll make the Muscat," but I said, "I need you to tell the bank that you're going to pay for the grapes as the wine is sold and so the bank will have a certain guarantee beside mine only." And that's the only way Fruit Industries helped me. And naturally, making all the Muscat for C.W.A., I had to enlarge the winery and had to crush twice as many grapes as I crushed before, and the returns were pretty good in those days. I mean, from what we paid for the grapes and what we got for the wine. We used to get big profit, no question about that. And that helped me quite a bit, no question about that too. But anybody else had the same chance; nobody would take it. But I took it, and it served Fruit Industries and served me and everybody.

Teiser: Why did the Muscat Co-operative go out of Fruit Industries?

Perelli-Minetti: They went out of Fruit Industries because they thought they could do better outside. Like many other cooperatives that did the same thing. Many cooperatives went out of Fruit Industries, when Taylor was still manager and after Taylor left.



Teiser: Mr. Barlotti's name has come up quite frequently. He was a very important figure in Fruit Industries early, wasn't he?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, because Italian Vineyard Company, Guasti\* was president of Fruit Industries at the beginning. Then when Guasti died, Barlotti was the president.

Teiser: Was he a good president of Fruit Industries?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. He was very conservative, because all his life he had been a conservative man. And one time I said to him, "Jim, why did you stay with Guasti all these years as secretary and things like that while you could have had a business of your own?" He said, "Tony, either you're born a businessman or you're born to work under somebody else, and I did that, and I did a good job of it."

Teiser: But you felt that he was an efficient man?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. He was very conservative, good administrator, there's no question about that.

Teiser: Why did people criticize him?

Perelli-Minetti: Because he was too cautious. He wouldn't take a chance. Was different from old man Guasti. Guasti would take a chance with the moon.

Teiser: How long did Barlotti stay with Fruit Industries then?

Perelli-Minetti: 'Til Italian Vineyard Company withdrew.

Teiser: 'Til Lanza bought it. I see. Did he go on working for I.V.C. then?

Perelli-Minetti: No, no, no, no. He withdrew completely.

Teiser: Did he go on in the industry after that?

Perelli-Minetti: No, he just retired. He had plenty of money.

Teiser: Then who became president of Fruit Industries after that?

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\*Secondo Guasti, Jr.



Perelli-Minetti: I think it was Jack Bare. Then it was rotated you know.

Teiser: Was it an important position, or was it just a nominal one?

Perelli-Minetti: It was nominal. Walter Taylor was the whole cheese. Put it like that. Walter Taylor and Hugh Adams, who was in the sales, they managed the company to suit themselves.

Teiser: Earlier, when Taylor first came in, were you satisfied with the way he was handling it?

Perelli-Minetti: At the beginning, yes, but then I didn't like it. Began to smell things. I'm very observing in my mode of life. Sometimes I don't say anything, but observe and just follow my hunch.

Teiser: When did Mr. Morrow come into Fruit Industries?

Perelli-Minetti: At the very beginning.

Teiser: Had the old California Wine Association disposed of its old property, Winehaven, by then?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, yes. That was already gone.

Teiser: Were you at Winehaven ever earlier?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: What was it like?

Perelli-Minetti: It was a beautiful winery. I bought some pumps and got some cooperage there. Standard Oil bought it.

Teiser: It was one of the biggest wineries in California, was it?

Perelli-Minetti: It was the biggest. No question about that.

Teiser: And was Mr. Morrow in direct charge of Winehaven?

Perelli-Minetti: Absolutely. They produced wine there and brought wine in from other producers that they'd had before. In San Francisco they had three big wineries, they concentrated them into one over in Richmond. Then they built a plant in New York on the waterfront, and shipped the wine through the Panama Canal by boat. Had cisterns of 50,000



Perelli-Minetti: gallons in each one, and when it arrived in New York it was pumped into the winery there. You see, before Prohibition the barrels were very cheap, \$2-\$3 apiece. Now a barrel's \$30. The freight then was a very few cents. Now it's 15-16¢ a gallon; couldn't compete with the water transportation. And then you can't sell in barrels any more, the law won't permit you. So things have changed by conditioning caused by law.

#### WINES AND STABILIZATION PLANS

Teiser: I've been told that after Repeal so much of the cooperage in which California wines were sent east was poor that the wines arrived in bad shape, although they were good when they left here.

Perelli-Minetti: But there was no good wine anyway, because they had no good grapes to get it from. Because all the good grapes had been pulled out.

Teiser: You had some wine that you had made earlier, didn't you?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, we had, but we put it in Fruit Industries. Had over a million gallons. But that went to Fruit Industries. So California Wine Association had 15 and 20 year old wine, went all into that...[slaps his hands] you figure that out.

Teiser: But California wine got a very poor reputation immediately after Repeal?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, naturally, there is no question about that. Natural consequence!

Teiser: Do you think that the Wine Institute did a good deal to counter that?

Perelli-Minetti: No, the Wine Institute didn't do much. The Wine Institute was more interested in laws, in passing laws that would help the industry rather than in promotion. The promotion came later. Then the Wine Advisory Board was formed, which received two cents a gallon from all sales to spend on advertising, which Wine Institute couldn't afford for lack of money.



- Teiser: Had Harry Caddow been in the wine industry before?
- Perelli-Minetti: No. Caddow was a tool of Donald Conn. Donald Conn was with the railroads before, or some transportation agency in Chicago, and Caddow was with him, was one of his employees. Caddow was smart, very smart; then he started to drink. Started to drink; he couldn't take it any more. I think he died a drunk.
- Teiser: He was with the Wine Institute in the beginning, wasn't he?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right. Yes, he was the first manager.
- Teiser: Did he do a good job there?
- Perelli-Minetti: He did a very good job while he was there, but you know... still he had to agree with Tom, Dick, and Harry, and sometime you don't know which way to go. He had to take a middle of the road that didn't satisfy anybody.
- Teiser: Yes, I should think it would be a very hard job to represent all the different segments of the California industry.
- Perelli-Minetti: It is, because the interests are so varied, and so different, that you can do something to please Gallo that wouldn't please us. Now, for instance, the law change in Washington state. For myself, I agree that Gallo is right, but in the meantime it hurts us because we had a good business with the monopoly state, which we won't have now. But from the long range point, I agree that Gallo was right, but if he had waited a couple of years, it would have been much better. We wouldn't have been off that bad. But I still recognize that he was right.
- Teiser: Is it possible for an organization like the Wine Institute to represent the whole industry equally?
- Perelli-Minetti: It is possible if the management of the Wine Institute is intelligent enough to grasp the thing that does the most good for the most people, and are able to stand against the other interests and say, "Well, you want this because it helps you, but how about the other fellows?" And that's a tough job because not everybody will do that. You'll have to have a man that can agree with five people at the same time, and that's the kind of man you have to have there.



Teiser: Should it be by the most people or most acreage, or by most tonnage, or by most gallonage?

Perelli-Minetti: No, I should think not. It should go by the interest of the industry at large. In my judgment it would be the best interest that would foment the use of wine. That should be the paramount basis of the thing of the Wine Institute.

Teiser: And you feel that hasn't always guided them?

Perelli-Minetti: Not in the past. That's why we withdrew.

Teiser: You think they were making it hard for the winemakers to...?

Perelli-Minetti: No, the winemaker has nothing to do with it. I mean, they couldn't make it any harder for the winemaker. They make it harder for the individual to compete with the bigger individual; that's where the shoe hurts. But taken all in all, since the Wine Advisory Board was established, it has increased the consumption of wine--not entirely due to the advertisement and the operation of the Wine Institute or Wine Advisory Board, but also the people themselves that go to Europe and they come back and they start to drink wine here and they say, "Well, it was good in Europe, why shouldn't it be good here?" They are young people. The Wine Institute gets all the credit, but it's not entitled to 100 per cent of that credit. In a large portion, possibly, yes.

The Wine Institute has done a good job on legislation. When Ohio wanted to pass a law and raise the taxation of California wine, Wine Institute said, "We'll do something." It engaged the manufacturers of that state to go before the legislature there and say, "No, we don't want this law because if you pass it our products will be taxed by California" and forced the legislature to go slow. So the Wine Institute, taken all for all, it did a good job there.

Teiser: Do you expect ever to rejoin it?

Perelli-Minetti: I don't know.

Teiser: Maybe when they get a new manager?\*

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\*At the time of the interview, no new manager had yet been named to succeed Don McColly.



Perelli-Minetti: Well, I wonder who's going to be the new manager. I want to see Baccigaluppi.\*

Teiser: Oh yes, you'd like to see him be it?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes.

Teiser: He's a fair-minded man, isn't he?

Perelli-Minetti: He's a fair-minded man. He's a little stubborn, but that's all right. And he knows the wine business quite well from the sales standpoint. He's a good salesman, he's a good talker, good personality. And I hope that he gets it.

Teiser: Would he take it, I wonder?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, now, that's the question, whether he'd take it or not. But since Lanza sold all the vineyard the Brees\*\* were moving out of Delano, it could interest Harry. Of course there is one thing, Baccigaluppi won't take the nonsense that this fellow's been taking from Gallo and some other people, especially from Gallo. But like one fellow said to me, "For \$60,000 a month, he could call me any damn thing he wanted." So there is a philosophy. Depends how passive you are.

Teiser: [Laughing] Yes, I guess so. Going back again--in 1961 there was what they called a set-aside program. Were you involved in that?

Perelli-Minetti: Everybody was. Every winery was involved in that.

Teiser: I mean were you for it? or against it?

Perelli-Minetti: It was based on setting aside part of the wine by every winery. I don't remember just the details. That was Rosenstiel's idea.

Teiser: I see. Lucius Powers was apparently very much for it.

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\*Harry Baccigaluppi

\*\*The Bree family, related by marriage to H.O. Lanza.



- Perelli-Minetti: Well, the trouble with Powers, he is a lawyer. His source of business comes from the law principally. He has some interest in a cooperative; they get some cock-eyed ideas, and... His father [Lucius Powers, Sr.] was different though. It was too bad he was killed. I remember him very well.
- Teiser: What sort of man was he?
- Perelli-Minetti: Very dynamic fellow.
- Teiser: Was he a good wine man?
- Perelli-Minetti: He was a good vineyardist. He didn't have any winery. He was a very powerful man, had influential voice in the politics of Fresno County.\*
- Teiser: I believe Lucius Powers, Jr., was for the 1961 set-aside program.
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Well, because that's...see it depends on which side you were on. The set-aside was to take away some of the surplus and age it. All right, you don't destroy that, you take it in; but some time it has to come back. So what's the good of it?
- Teiser: Was there some thought of developing foreign markets for it?
- Perelli-Minetti: You couldn't put the dollar against the cheap money in the foreign countries. How could you do that? First of all, we haven't got good wines to send over there. The only wine that we could send over there would be wine from Napa-Sonoma Counties. The rest of the wine that we produce now, dry wine, is like the Algerian wine, and some parts of Europe they won't take it. Therefore, if we took the Napa wine and other wine that could compete with Europe in wine, we would destroy our own market. That's the point.
- Teiser: Yes. Here's what Amerine and Singleton\*\* say about the '61 set-aside: "This program called for setting aside a certain percentage of the wines or brandy or concentrate from the San Joaquin Valley, the main surplus area..., and later

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\*See also Lucius Powers, The Fresno Area and the California Wine Industry, a Regional Oral History Office interview completed in 1974.

\*\*Wine: An Introduction for Americans, p. 286.



Teiser: disposing of these products into other channels of trade"-- whatever they were--"alcohol for industrial purposes," and so forth.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, but it wasn't done.

Teiser: It wasn't?

Perelli-Minetti: No.

Teiser: They couldn't get rid of it?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, the loss would have been so much for some, and others could stand it. So the wine came back into the market again.

Teiser: There have been so many attempts in the industry to stabilize prices.

Perelli-Minetti: That under the N.R.A.,\* that would have done it.

Teiser: It would have?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, I think so. But it would only benefit the big fellow. Had I been independent then it would have hurt me, but I was part of Fruit Industries. I was protected. But the other little fellow, it just would be murder.

#### RECENT TRENDS

Teiser: The national companies have been coming increasingly into the field here; do you think they're going to stay in the wine business?

Perelli-Minetti: I imagine so. I believe, because they can see the hand written wall that the wine business is on the increase, has a tremendous future, while the whiskey's only static. And there could be also this: say that Prohibition is repeated--not Prohibition in the sense that they had it

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\*National Recovery Act of 1933.



Perelli-Minetti: before, that they control the sale of hard liquor, brandy, whiskey, and things like that--which I hope they do because they're dangerous to the health of the people. Now we make brandy because people want it, we make what they want. But if I could, like I begged Roosevelt, just cut out anything except the table wine, and let the other products be sold only through monopoly states. No saloons. Then you wouldn't see what you see today, women at the bar, men at the bar; they have no place to go, the poor devils; I feel so sorry. How can they go on, night after night, sit down at the bar and take four or five drinks, then they haven't got a taste for a good steak or a good dinner. It would have made a different state of conditions and results.

Teiser: The earlier experience of the national companies with Masson and others was...?

Perelli-Minetti: The first that came in the wine business after Schenley and bought Italian Swiss Colony-- What was that name? National Distillers. Then they sold out. And then came back in again.

Teiser: It was said that their earlier experiences indicated that they just didn't understand the wine business and that's why they didn't stay in it.

Perelli-Minetti: That's right.

Teiser: Well, why would they understand it now when they didn't before?

Perelli-Minetti: Because they feel that, while there is no immediate money in it, they're building for the future. And now they can afford to lose money in the wine business, and they take tax money for that purpose, you see.

Teiser: Ah, yes. So they won't put pressure on the wineries?

Perelli-Minetti: No. It's just like many companies are going to farming. They're making so much money that they are diverting part of it to developing farming, and if they lose money in it they don't give a darn because they take it off the tax. Uncle Sam is the one that loses. But now the whiskey people are doing the same thing. They're making profit from the whiskey, and banking on the future of the wine



Perelli-Minetti: industry. You have read the Forbes report and many others, that the future of the wine industry is unlimited, the amount of table wine that can be consumed in the United States when you have got so many million of people. Now you've got all kinds of people, whether Methodist or Adventist, the young people, they all drink. It isn't like 50 years ago any more. So there is a chance. And then it's a healthy drink, and there is a possibility to curb the abuse of whiskey and those other products that hurt. Now the sale of whiskey is about 250 million gallons against 150 million gallons of wine; that's a big difference. And most of that wine is still sweet wine which is not much different from whiskey; nothing but a tax affair, because two bottles of sweet wine are equal to one bottle of whiskey in alcoholic content. You drink more liquid in sweet wine, but you pay 60¢ tax on a gallon against \$11 for whiskey.

The whiskey people tried their best to have the wine be taxed on alcoholic basis; I mean, the fortified wine to pay on the basis of 20 per cent alcohol. If whiskey, 40 per cent (which is 80 proof) pays \$11, then wine at 20 per cent should pay \$5. That would destroy the sweet wine completely, but on the other hand, it would increase the sale of the dry wine. If you could make a survey of all the grapes that left the state in Prohibition to be made into wine (bootlegging), you could easily figure 700,000,000 - 800,000,000 gallons of dry wine were drunk in the East only. Which disappeared completely with the advent of Repeal.

Teiser: Then people went to sweet wines, didn't they?

Perelli-Minetti: Naturally, because the women and the men, the women mostly, drank the cocktail. They were weaned on sweet stuff, and they couldn't take the dry wine. But now, who drinks the sweet wine? Just the niggers and the people who want to get drunk (now let's be frank), and can't afford a bottle of whiskey.

Teiser: Who drinks these flavored wines?

Perelli-Minetti: The Negroes. And that shouldn't occur. The state shouldn't permit that. Under the state law, you cannot use sugar in the winery expressly used for wine produced from grapes. Flavored wines should be produced exclusively in a separate winery. We are not doing it. California Wine Association



Perelli-Minetti: is not doing it.

Teiser: Some winemakers are using sugar?

Perelli-Minetti: To make those...

Teiser: Those flavored drinks?

Perelli-Minetti: Sure.

Teiser: I know they say some women like them who wouldn't otherwise drink wines.

Perelli-Minetti: But some women are indulging too much. Some women are just completely gone. It's just an alcoholic soft drink. That's what it is.

Teiser: Maybe it's the Coca-Cola drinkers...

Perelli-Minetti: Probably so. In Prohibition days they used to spike the Coca-Cola.

Teiser: What do you think the picture is going to be in the future? Do you think we're going to have more nationally owned companies coming in?

Perelli-Minetti: I think so. That's the safety of the state. In the big valley too many small companies will wreck each other. On the other hand you'll have a number of premium wine producers, small companies or individuals that will confine themselves to the production of their vineyards, no more. And those will be on the increase and will go ahead for many, many years to come because they are not interested in getting beyond their production. Now those people will survive.

Teiser: This is like, for instance, Beaulieu?\* The way it operates.

Perelli-Minetti: That's right. Now [Louis M.] Martini is on the wrong foot now because he wants to stay with the demand, and it's

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\*Note that this interview occurred while Beaulieu Vineyard was still family-owned.



Perelli-Minetti: deteriorating his quality to a point where Martini wine is not the wine it used to be at the beginning when he confined himself to 100 per cent Napa and Sonoma grapes. And so that's the bad feature of it. But when small individuals come in with a good quality and confine themselves, it just will be the same thing like the chateaux in France or the small places in Italy, where you produce 100,000 gallons, 20,000 gallons, 10,000 gallons; when that's gone, no more.

Teiser: How small a winery can you operate and have it worth the investment?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, I think the man that could give you the answer to that is Ficklin, in Madera, because he's doing that very thing I'm speaking of.

Teiser: Ah, yes. Making port.

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Makes wine from the grapes that we won't use.

Teiser: Really?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Because those came from Portugal and came from our vineyard.

Teiser: Did he get his stock from you?

Perelli-Minetti: Not directly from us. He got it from other people who had got it from us. Because when Dr. [H.P.] Olmo came back from Portugal, he had with him a complete set of all the vines in Portugal. I think there were 43 or 45 different varieties that are mostly used in Portugal. He didn't have any place to propagate them and he called me on the phone and said, "Tony, I've got grape cuttings; can you plant them for me or graft them for me?" I said, "Yes, I'll do it." So he sent them down to me, and in front of my house there are 43 rows, 45 rows, I don't remember exactly, start from the west, go to the east. Each half row is one variety. At the beginning, we got a few of the varieties that we thought were wonderful and we planted 20-30 acres and then we pulled them out.\* Schenley got them from us.

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\*See also p. 40.



Perelli-Minetti: And I imagine Mr. Ficklin got them from Schenley. Of course a vine will produce a wine that will be different from that produced in another place a mile or so away. Those Portuguese grapes don't produce much of a crop; we needed production because when you're in business like we are, production comes first, because then we can meet competition. You may have to lower the price one cent or two cents a gallon, and you still can be in business because of cheaper production. Ficklin, on the other hand, has a small vineyard, 20 acres or 30 acres, I don't know how much he has. Well, he will survive because he priced on his wine so high that if he has only 20 acres and produces only 100 or 150 tons, it will return \$300 or \$400 a ton for his grapes. And he can't afford to grow beyond that. The only way he could grow is a very slow process, that of keeping with the demand, and maintaining the same quality. But that process is so slow, see. But like Gallo, ourselves, and many others, we have to go to the general public by pushing the sales and making it known that we have supply and quality--not by radio or t.v. for lack of money, but mostly by personal contact. Each company does it the best they can. And then you have to face competition, and if you don't watch yourself, you just can go through the window so damn fast it'll make your head swim!

Teiser: Two wineries, I guess, have experienced that, haven't they? Roma and Cresta Blanca?

Perelli-Minetti: Completely. They are just practically out. Cresta Blanca I think is for sale. Roma is for sale. Schenley is giving up the wine business. I understand that Setrakian was making a deal to produce a brandy for them for 30 years. Now I understand that Setrakian has a large inventory of brandy and he's selling his grapes. As a matter of fact, he wants us to buy 5,000 tons of his grapes he is not going to ship this year.



## WINERY-GROWER RELATIONSHIPS

- Perelli-Minetti: Last week we called our buyers and told them we were going to buy grapes, a limited tonnage. We were offered 15,000 tons of Thompson by the growers of the Delano district that ship grapes. They're going to cut their shipping and sell the grapes to wine.
- Teiser: This year?
- Perelli-Minetti: Yes.
- Teiser: I think Gallo does some contracting for grapes with the growers.
- Perelli-Minetti: He always does that. We contract with the grower when the market opens up. When Gallo starts buying, then we start buying too.
- Teiser: But I mean, do you contract with him for so much acreage...
- Perelli-Minetti: Oh, you mean for the future?
- Teiser: Yes.
- Perelli-Minetti: Oh no, no. We don't do that. No, it is fraught with danger. Our vineyards produce, at the outside, 4,000 tons of Thompson grapes. The rest are all black grapes. We produce enough black grapes for our own purposes. Therefore it would be stupid for us to go and buy black grapes at \$50 a ton when we can buy Thompson for \$30. There is that big difference. Now Thompsons this year go maybe \$50 a ton, which isn't high price when you consider everything. Then black grapes may be \$70 a ton. Why pay \$20 premium for something we don't need?
- Teiser: Well, when the winemaker contracts in advance, then he can dictate what shall be grown, can't he, and how it should be grown?
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right. Gallo contract is \$75 a ton even if the market is lower. If the market is higher than he'll meet the market price, whichever that is for that particular variety. But the grower has to plant specific varieties and he has to sign a contract for 15 years and do certain amount of work...



Teiser: Specified work?

Perelli-Minetti: Specified work. That grower can't prune the grapes to overcrop them so as to destroy the quality of those grapes. He has to abide strictly to certain cultural practices. Well, if you come out and guarantee a man \$75 a ton, which is a big price, I think you have the right to impose the condition. And I think Gallo has the right to do that. We can't afford such contracts. Gallo has the market, which we haven't got, and therefore we must be very cautious. I mean, they and Heublein control the market.

Paul Masson (Paul Masson is Seagram) and Almaden have money and have been able to stay in the wine business, and made a success of it from the standpoint of sales. But now what they have to do is improve the quality of their wines.

Teiser: Do those companies contract in advance, or buy on the open market? Or how do they get their grapes?

Perelli-Minetti: Almaden practically produces their own grapes. And Paul Masson buys wine in Sonoma and Napa counties, for blending.

Teiser: After it's made?

Perelli-Minetti: After it's made.

Teiser: They don't make all their own?

Perelli-Minetti: No, they don't produce all their wines. They planted a big vineyard down at Soledad; they also built a big winery there, too. So they produce wine there. Wineries make the wine for them. Of course their plant in Saratoga is not equipped to make wine. It's a blending and storage plant only.

Teiser: Are there any other winemakers in the state who contract for acreage in advance as Gallo does?

Perelli-Minetti: Nobody has I know of. Schenley tried to do that very early. They wanted to do it for \$50 a ton. Schenley made a tremendous mistake. I do not want to take any credit for it, but I pointed out to them that the contract they made with the other wineries was wrong. They tried to corner



Perelli-Minetti: the wine market completely and would have succeeded, had they not fixed the gallonage that each ton of grapes would produce. I said, 'Mr. Rosenstiel,\* if I crush for you 20,000 tons of grapes, and I make so many gallons of wine, and I give to you maybe 95 per cent because that's the amount I have to give you, five per cent of that is mine. I can undermine you because I can sell that wine against yours.'

Then the worst feature of that was that he set no limit to the price. So he had all these wineries were making wine for Schenley on a fixed \$15 a ton processing, besides retaining the surplus beyond a certain gallonage. So the wineries started to raise the price to \$60 a ton in order to get the grapes, until it reached \$105 a ton. Schenley was paying the bill.

Teiser: They had people bidding against each other?

Perelli-Minetti: Against each other, sure, because at \$15 a ton to process the grapes, there was \$6-\$7 profit in each ton, plus two-three gallons or five gallons of surplus wine. Well now that meant \$10 profit. The winery was interested in tonnage. What's the difference? It did not come out of their pocket. Schenley was paying. So the wineries would bid against each other for grapes, and the price went up to \$105-\$110. Some of those grapes sold five or six times back and forth. That's the way the grower acts. He is inclined to divert some of his crop, and nothing can be done about it.

Teiser: Well, that's what I meant when I said that the national companies didn't understand the wine business.

Perelli-Minetti: Well, Schenley understood the business partly because he wanted to control it, and he would have succeeded if he had known the details.

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\*Lewis S. Rosenstiel



## CORPORATIONS AND COOPERATIVES

Teiser: Would it be possible for one company to control it really?

Perelli-Minetti: For a few years, yes. But then the other companies would gradually expand, inducing the growers to plant additional grapes, which they could afford to pay 50¢ or a dollar more a ton (could operate cheaper). The co-op would come into being, but due to grower-member attitude they soon would find themselves in serious trouble. The grower sells its grapes to a commercial organization and ruins its own company. In Italy, in France, where grape production is static, co-ops function to better advantage. But in California, first of all, commercial companies can get grapes, raise the price. The grower will pay a \$5 fine to the co-op and sell to the commercial. He's the worst enemy of his own co-op. Then when the price goes up, the grower starts planting more grapes. The commercial company lowers the price, and the cooperative gets glutted with grapes when the commercial won't buy. That's why grape cooperatives can't very well function in California.

Teiser: Do you think they're going to disappear here?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, the average cooperative is a bulk sale operation, and bulk sales, you know, are getting lower and lower. If the state enacts a law that no wine could go out of the state except in bottles, all bulk sales are out, and those producers must look to inter-winery only for disposal of their inventories.

Teiser: Could they survive?

Perelli-Minetti: Not unless they joined some big company or produced wine for Gallo or some other company, just for inter-winery sale. If they make good wine and are not hoggish, they could survive. Limitedly, with just a small profit to stay alive, I think so.

Teiser: But in general you think it's going to be between the small winery and the corporation, and not much between?

Perelli-Minetti: Not too much because to establish a label in the market is extremely expensive. What sells is the label, not the wine. If it was in the olden days when people knew



Perelli-Minetti: what wine was, what was good and what was bad, then it would be easier to establish a label. But today the people buy the label, buy Almaden, buy Paul Masson because they are the most advertised. And Gallo too advertises extensively. Nobody else can afford it, only in limited amount. Heublein is starting just now.

Heublein is an asset to the wine industry. So is Gallo because they are in it for profit. The large companies are in more for sale. In some instances they gave the wine away. All they wanted was to sell that mass of wine. Under the contract Heublein has with the grower, it has to pay \$35 minimum for the grapes. Now Gallo, coming out with \$48, Heublein is forced to pay \$48 or be in trouble with the grower. If we get rains and can't make raisins then more trouble for Heublein, as some of those growers have Thompsons. Gallo, to come out with \$48, stabilizes the grape market, making it easier to buy grapes. Gallo had an established market before Heublein came in, and sells more.

Teiser: But doesn't Heublein have a firm association with this group of growers?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes, but...

Teiser: Can they sell to others if they want?

Perelli-Minetti: No. No, they cannot. Their grapes must go to Heublein.

Teiser: Even with a penalty?

Perelli-Minetti: I don't know that. I don't think so. I think that's been removed from the new contract. Because if that was in the contract, Heublein would be stupid. Then it would have no contract with the growers so to speak. The grower's obligated to put everything into Heublein. Now, the Italian Swiss Colony, before Heublein came in, their major sale was bulk sale, which now in Heublein is out. Heublein's going to sell everything in bottles and raise the price, to make profit. So that helps us and helps anybody that has a small part in the market. With the label, our business is going up. Our profits are slightly increased, not much, we never made much profit. We have made a small profit on the end of the year because of income from real estate. Some years we only made \$90 on an operation of a sale of \$6,000,000 - \$7,000,000, and that \$90 actually



Perelli-Minetti: represented a loss of \$100,000, because we got that money from real estate rents in excess of \$100,000, and that's what kept us going. For three years we lost money, although we showed a profit of \$90.\*

That's just the last four, five years. In the '60s. It just happened that we had the foresight to buy the real estate and that the bank helped us. As I said before, I think, we owe that to Security First National Bank that had the confidence in us, and gave us the money to buy the land, gave me the money to buy a commercial building. Last week we got a letter from the insurance company that there was \$45 final payment, and when we sent the check in, the insurance company reconveyed the deed to us. We burned the mortgage. That's the first mortgage I've had in my life. Because with Security we have no mortgage. It's just open.

Teiser: That's a wonderful relationship.

Perelli-Minetti: We've been since 1931 with Security Bank. Never have had a hitch. When we lost money they put in more money to complete the cycle. When Sartori was president of the bank, he used to tell me all the time, 'We put more faith in the honesty and ability of the man than on his collateral. Because if he's a crook, we have to watch him because he could make his collateral disappear and then...And we have been caught some times like that. We don't want to have anybody we have to watch with a shotgun. That's why we help the good ones.'

#### EUROPEAN AND CALIFORNIA WINES

Teiser: I should think the wine business would be one that it'd be hard to be crooked in because there's so much regulation.

Perelli-Minetti: Not [laughing] when you read what happened in Italy.

Teiser: Oh, yes. I think I drank some of that wine in Italy, too.

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\*See pp. 85-86.



Perelli-Minetti: I think I drank that some time myself.

Teiser: Tasted like nothing. Do you think that the ordinary wines in Italy are as good as our ordinary wines? Or in France?

Perelli-Minetti: The ordinary wine in Paris, for instance, it's not good wine. It's all Algerian wine. And what they send over here is Algerian wine blended with some French, because the wine that's produced in France today is not enough to supply the French internal consumption. And those that are great wine, they don't export. Oh, some. Now, you go...I've been to several of these French tastings. Some are good but not in...

Teiser: You mean, even the ones that they prize?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. Now, we went once to a wine tasting in Los Angeles given at the Wilshire Hotel, and they had one wine for \$2.50 a bottle that was the best wine. It was an unknown brand; it was beautiful wine, and some of the wines that cost \$14-\$15 a bottle I wouldn't give 10¢ for it. So there you are.

Teiser: Do you think that our under-a-dollar-a-bottle wines are as good as the inexpensive wines in Europe?

Perelli-Minetti: Not as good. No. Big difference. But let me tell you this. When we were at this tasting, there was a couple following us all the time. With me was a young man who has been a tasting judge in Sacramento for some time. The couple asked us, "We want to give a party. What would you suggest?" We said, "Wrap the bottles up so you can't see the label, put a number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, on them, and then offer prizes." Well, I think there were eight or nine women. Except one, they all chose one variety, and that was Carlo Rossi. That's the cheapest. [Laughter] It's a very light wine, kind of sweetish. But that pleased them.

When people ask me what wine they should drink, I always suggest this: "Take a few brands, take one brand today, and another brand tomorrow, and another brand the next day, another brand the following day, and then the one you like the best, that's the one you should stick to. Because my palate is different than your palate. The food you eat is different from what I eat. Certain wines will



Perelli-Minetti: go with certain foods, certain wines won't go with the same food."

And that's the only way you can tell because it's just like a dress and a pair of shoes, I like this way, you like the other way. I like a décolleté; I like them closed up. So it's the same thing in anything in life.

Teiser: But you think that the ordinary wines of Europe today are better than the ordinary wines in California?

Perelli-Minetti: I think so. We lack the varieties, better grapes. Not only that--you see, there a big trouble here. Take for instance Zinfandel. The growers plant it all over the state without any consideration, and that is the trouble. But on the other hand it would take a thousand years to select the proper variety for the proper location, which in Europe has been done over a thousand years because of economic reasons. They were compelled to do it. Even in the same district, you have different varieties. Now that process will come in time. We're in that process now. You see, I buy grapes in Lodi, I buy grapes in Fresno, I buy grapes in other places, and it all goes in the same vat. But when the palate of the public becomes sharpened, then it will compel you to improve your quality or get out of business--which means, we will buy the grapes that give better wine. Now in our case, we are doing that very thing now. We've been doing that for years. I showed you that book where we're doing...

Teiser: Yes, experimenting.

Perelli-Minetti: Experimenting. And we've planted. We've pulled 500 acres between this last season and the year before, so we can plant this new variety in. We have already 400 acres of one variety which is patented.

Teiser: What variety is that? Your own?

Perelli-Minetti: Our own, yes. So now we've six, seven varieties that we've produced that are under experiment. But we have to wait five years, six years to make sure that they won't throw back. So this year we grafted two rows, next year we'll graft 20 acres, and then from there, go on and get the cuttings for the field.

Teiser: And this is what Europe has done over many years?



Perelli-Minetti: They had to do it, because a grower could sell his grapes or wine, while the grower next to him who had the same variety of wine or grapes from land of different character could not sell his unless at a very much lower price, or not at all, or only if there were a shortage. So then you start to figure out what you could do, and you start to change the variety. Now you take any district in Italy, even small ones are planted to different varieties. That's compelled by conditions. It all comes to dollars and cents.

#### WINE GRAPE GROWING AREAS IN CALIFORNIA

Teiser: Here in California there used to be a fair number of wineries in the Mother Lode, and then I believe in the '30's or early '40's there was interest again in planting vineyards up there. Have you ever looked at the grapes up in there? The old plantings?

Perelli-Minetti: They made good wines. Beautiful wines. But when the price crashed, they couldn't stand it. Production was small, labor became high. Now there is one winery started over there in El Dorado County. There's another one started in Jackson. Those wineries, they will survive as will the ones like Ficklin that will limit themselves to their production and will get a high price for their wines if they plant good varieties best adapted to their soil and general conditions.

Teiser: You think that Mother Lode area can produce good wines?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, beautiful wines.

Teiser: Just as good as the Napa Valley?

Perelli-Minetti: Absolutely. And much better than Napa Valley, too. Much better than Napa. Mendocino produces better wine than Napa. And Lake County produces one of the best wines in the state. I had wines made from grapes that were produced in Lake County, I remember. We used to buy the grapes from Mr. Lyons.\* Facing Clear Lake, one end of Clear Lake. Was beautiful wine.

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\*Probably George A. Lyons, Jr.



Teiser: When was that?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, before Prohibition. I remember that we had a tank of that wine, and Mr. [W.C.] Durant, that used to build the Durant car, you remember? He was living next to Tribuno there in Bayside, New York, and when he tasted the wine, he said, "Oh, my God, can I get some of this?" So we had 2,000 gallons of that, and we sent 20 barrels to Tribuno, and 20 barrels to Mr. Durant. So Lake County has tremendous possibilities and land that can be put into grapes. In the old days the trouble was transportation. There is no railroad in Lake County. But now you have highways and you have trucks, so transportation is no problem. But beautiful grapes can be produced there. You are subject to more frost there, but there are pears, there are peaches, there are cherries, etcetera. Why not grapes?

There's some plateaus there that are the most beautiful land that you've ever seen. Of course you have to clear it. That costs money, maybe \$150 an acre to begin with, and then you have to probably establish the sprinkler system to protect you from frost. But that's secondary because I was just talking to some people today about that. You don't get frost every year, but if you go four or five years without frost and then you get a frost, the average wine grape will produce some second crop. The grower will still average a profit. Now if you lose Thompson by frost, that's it. But with wine grapes, you will get enough to likely cover the costs.

Teiser: I see. Does frost have any detrimental effect on the vine over the long haul?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, it has a chance to soursap the vine, yes. Because it stops the circulation of the sap.

Teiser: I suppose there is limitless acreage possible for wine...

Perelli-Minetti: California is tremendous. All the coast here between here and the ocean all the way down to Santa Maria. All that coast country can just produce beautiful wine. We used to buy grapes from [Ignace] Paderewski, near Paso Robles. There are two or three wineries there now. I think one is York at Templeton, and they make beautiful wine. Oh, beautiful wine. But now you can't buy the grapes there.



Perelli-Minetti: I think they've formed a co-op over there now, and more planting is going on. All that land between Morro Bay and north of Cayucos and all that country there. There is no limit in California for grape planting. All the coast country makes beautiful wines. Now, think of this, if we get change of weather like we just have had this year, it's going to make a big difference in the quality of grapes in the San Joaquin Valley.

Teiser: When weather conditions make good grapes in the San Joaquin Valley, are they likely to make for good grapes in other areas too?

Perelli-Minetti: Well, if the weather is good in San Joaquin Valley, it's good some place else too. Now we used to buy quite a lot of wine from Gualala.

Teiser: Up in Mendocino. Really?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, yes. Most beautiful wine. There were some beautiful vineyards up there overlooking the Pacific. And there is a plateau between Ukiah and the coast that if planted would produce the best wine in the country. If I were a young man, I'd go to that coast.

In 1903, we almost bought 1,000 acres in Lake County between two friends of mine, myself, and my brother. I was going to go over there to develop the land, as we were to make a deal with a Mr. Stokes, who was enthusiastically interested in wine. I think the land cost was \$5 to \$10 an acre, on a 20-year payment; each one of the other partners would put up half of their salaries to sustain me and to sustain the work there to clear the brush off and start planting grapes. But it didn't pan out because nobody would sign up properly and put a firm guarantee, and I said to myself, "Why should I sacrifice myself over there and then all of a sudden find myself alone?" But there is a tremendous future in Lake County. The wine that you can make from those grapes is simply beautiful.

Teiser: You said that your end of the San Joaquin had capabilities for additional acreage.

Perelli-Minetti: In the foothills. Tremendous amount. There is no end to the foothills.

Teiser: Of course, the more you get into mechanical harvesting, the



Teiser: more the foothill land is thrown into a special category, isn't it?

Perelli-Minetti: That's true, because the foothills, because of very limited water, with overhead sprinklers, growing of grapes would be close to dry farming. And mechanical harvesting, barring heavy rains, can be successfully done at any time. In the flat land, a light rain would prevent mechanical harvesting for a longer time. Now on the coast they don't need much water because of the heavy fog.

Teiser: Can you use mechanical harvesters on foothill land though? Will they maneuver on hills?

Perelli-Minetti: Oh, sure. Because the foothills are not steep. They are gently rolling land. Some of those rolling hills were in grapes before. Then, Prohibition came, they just disappeared.

Teiser: Do you see mechanical harvesting as changing the industry?

Perelli-Minetti: No, I don't see that. And frankly, I doubt whether it will be successful from the economical standpoint. Because, while it saves you money in picking--say \$2 or \$3 or \$4 a ton--on the other hand, it might lose you more grapes to offset that difference.

Teiser: You mean that go unpicked?

Perelli-Minetti: Partly that. Partly it shakes the berry to the ground from vines ahead of the machine, and further and most important there is a loss of 10 to 15 per cent of juice, and juice is what makes the wine. This is very serious and must be considered very carefully.

Teiser: The new varieties that you're growing, are they amenable to mechanical harvesting?

Perelli-Minetti: Some are and some aren't. But some varieties are worth hand picking. Those grapes are unmatched for wine quality in the Valley, and the new varieties that will permit mechanical harvesting will be the same all over the Valley, with very different quality results.



## CALIFORNIA VARIETAL WINES

- Teiser: The trend in the industry toward wines with the name of the grape varieties--do you see that as continuing?
- Perelli-Minetti: I think so. Because Almaden and Paul Masson, who are the biggest advertisers, and now Gallo comes out, too, featuring grape names. So we have decided to plant a few acres ourselves, even if we don't get anything out of it, just to justify the label and use our grapes to overcome the deficiency of the other grapes.
- Teiser: As you were saying about Zinfandel, the variety differs according to where it is grown.
- Perelli-Minetti: That's right. Same applies to every variety. Take the wine made from Thompson grown around Kingsburg, it is bitter because of the magnesium in the soil. It is hard to drink it except as sweet wine, because there's so much magnesium in the soil that shows up in the wine, and it's very bitter no matter what you do with it.
- Teiser: But for instance, all the burgundies on the market, don't they vary more than all the Zinfandels?
- Perelli-Minetti: The burgundy on the market is just red wine. Made from anything, made from Ribier, made from Alicante, made from anything. Just red wine; it's a common name.
- Teiser: But it spans a longer span than Zinfandels, doesn't it?
- Perelli-Minetti: No, not really. But that's where the public comes in. Now the public buys burgundy, and if it is good burgundy, real burgundy, you're going to make sales; the competitor would not sell if the public knew wines. But as long as the American public buys the label, anything goes as long as it's red, and that's all.
- Teiser: It's not worth making a good burgundy?
- Perelli-Minetti: Exactly. It's always a dollar and cents thing.
- Teiser: So you make a Cabernet Sauvignon that sells?
- Perelli-Minetti: If you can. But how can anyone make good Cabernet Sauvignon in the Valley? Wine may be produced from



Perelli-Minetti: Cabernet Sauvignon grapes grown in the Valley, but it's not the Cabernet Sauvignon as it would be understood in France, where it's restricted to certain districts only.

Teiser: Do you think this country will ever come to controlling wines by district the way they do there?

Perelli-Minetti: That could be a possibility. And if we do that, then we can improve quality. [repeat] Then we can improve quality.

Teiser: And each district would develop its best?

Perelli-Minetti: Yes. But as long as there is a shortage of grapes as there is now... That will come when there is a surplus of grapes. There is no surplus of grapes yet, because no winery carries a big inventory. But when the wineries are properly financed, and the public can get some good, properly aged wine, then the public will begin to know the difference. And then the label is going to be the second thought. The first thought is going to be what's inside the bottle. And I hope we come to that.

Transcriber: Julie Henderson

Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto



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alla Commissione

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## Breve storia di GIUSEPPE e di ANTONIO PERELLI-MINETTI (californiano di Barletta) raccontata da Giovanni Dalmasso.

*(A brief account of Giuseppe and Antonio Perelli-Minetti  
told by Giovanni Dalmasso)*

*From Vini D'Italia, March-April 1970*

*Estratto da*

# VINI D'ITALIA

RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE DI TECNICA, LEGISLAZIONE  
E PROPAGANDA ENOLOGICA E VITICOLA

anno XII, n. 65 - marzo-aprile 1970

*Luigi Scialpi Editore*

00136 Roma, Via U. De Carolis 31 - C/c postale n. 1.11548



Quasi un secolo fa — esattamente nel 1876 — usciva in Barletta la 3ª edizione di un libricino di 108 pagine, portante un titolo non privo, ancor oggi, di suggestione: *Sull'assoluta necessità di migliorare la vinificazione delle Tre Puglie*. Autore Giuseppe PERELLI-MINETTI, Direttore Tecnico degli Stabilimenti vinicoli Rakosi e Perelli, in Barletta e Brindisi. Se nel 1876 l'opera era già alla 3ª edizione (riveduta e ampliata) si può ben supporre che la 1ª dovesse risalire proprio ad un secolo fa (ma non abbiamo modo d'accertarlo) (1).

Comunque essa è oggi quasi una rarità bibliografica. Ne esiste un esemplare presso la Biblioteca Comunale di Barletta; ma non in quella della Cantina Sperimentale, la più antica di queste istituzioni sorte in Italia. Confesso che io ne ignoravo l'esistenza prima di ricevere una fotocopia completa di questo libro dal figlio dell'Autore, l'enotecnico Antonio PERELLI-MINETTI.

Varrebbe la pena di riesumare, analizzandola, quest'opera ormai veneranda, anche per rendersi conto di qual'era la situazione della viticoltura e dell'enologia pugliese un secolo fa. Non è però lo scopo precipuo di queste mie brevi note. Mi limiterò quindi a ricordare che da essa si apprende che i vitigni allora predominanti nelle « Tre Puglie » erano in gran parte quelli che ancora oggi vi sono più diffusi, quali l'*Uva di Troia* (o *vitigno di Canosa*); il *Negro Amaro* (o *Nero Amaro*, o *Uva Olivetta*, o *Purcinara*), la *Lagrime* (che l'Autore considera una varietà dell'*Olivello*), la *Malvasia nera*, il *Susomaniello* (cioè il *Somarello nero*), il *Primitivo*, il *Nero dolce* (o *Somarello rosso*), l'*Aleatico*, lo *Zagarese*, e qualche altro meno coltivato. E fra i bianchi le *Malvasie*, le *Moscatelle* (che comprendevano anche il *Moscato di Trani*), il *Bombino*, il *Colatamburo*, l'*Asprino*, la *Verdeca* (o *Verdea*); il *Greco*, il *Pagadebito*, il *Bianco di Palumbo*.

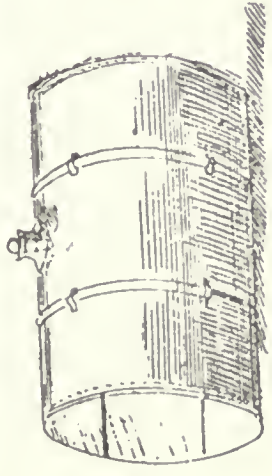
Quanto ai vini di massa, l'Autore ne distingueva tre tipi: un vino rosso-nero comune (o « da pasto meridionale »), un vino « nero da taglio », un vino bianco comune. Egli però affermava che nelle contrade più favorite si poteva tentare di estendere la confezione di due tipi di vini « di lusso »: uno da dessert alcoolico-dolce, e uno alcoolico

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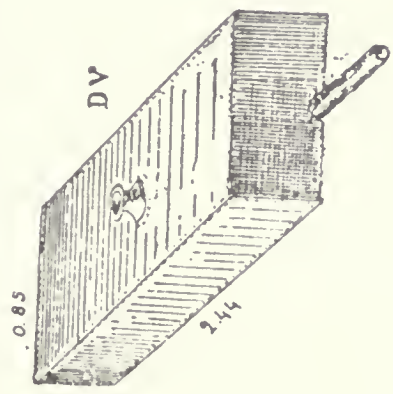
(1) Dal prezioso *Saggio storico e bibliografico dell'Agricoltura italiana* di V. Niccoli (UTET, Torino 1902) risulta che una 1ª edizione sarebbe apparsa a Milano (Tip. Civelli) nel 1874; quella del 1876 (Vecchi e soci, Barletta) figura come 2ª. Ma non s'accenna a una 3ª. (G. D.)



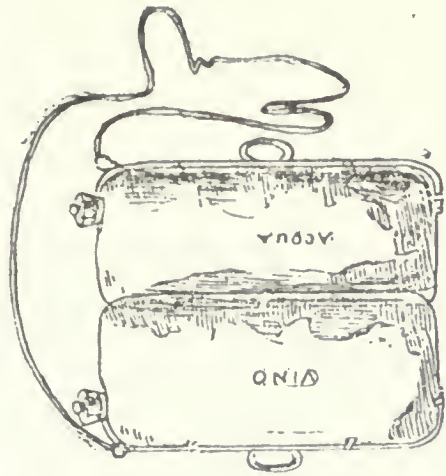
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SERBATOIO DV di ettoltri 15, per carretta pugliese per trasporto di mosti, vini, acque, ecc.



BORACCIA a due scompartimenti per militari con maniglie legno, ecc.



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# Avvertenza.

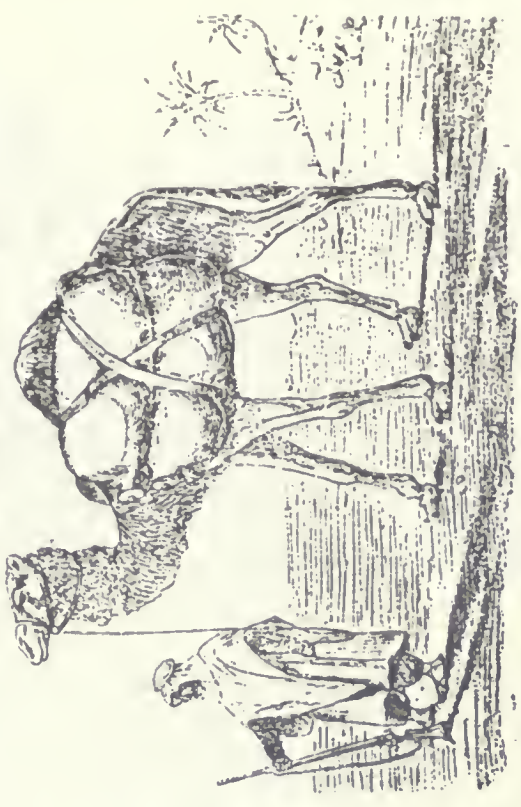
I Serbatoi e Recipienti tela hanno dal lato igienico una incontrastabile superiorità in confronto a quelli di ferro, rame, zinco, stagnati o verniciati; poichè, soggiornandovi l'uva o il vino 15 ai 30 giorni nei viaggi, è constatato che le vernici e i metalli vengono intaccati dai componenti del vino, alterandolo nel colore e nel gusto, specialmente se bianco, ciò che non è riconosciuto favorevole all'igiene e alla pubblica salute.

CAVALLO con 4 recipienti — per uva, mosti, vini, olii, acque, ecc.



BREVETTI GIUS. PERELLI-MINETTI — BARLETTA - MILANO

CAMELLO con 4 recipienti — per acque, vini, olii, ecc.



BREVETTI GIUS. PERELLI-MINETTI — BARLETTA - MILANO



secco. Ma la loro preparazione (aggiungeva) « ha bisogno di molte cure e di tante manipolazioni per ottenere vari tipi a seconda dei vari gusti dei mercati consumatori »; e si possono ottenere « prezzi straordinari », ma dovrebbero « venire direttamente, fin dalla raccolta dell'uva, confezionati dall'Industria e Commercio ».

Ripeto che non è mio intendimento spulciare da questo libro quasi centenario le molte cose che potrebbero tuttora riuscire interessanti, o quanto meno curiose. Mi limiterò a ricordare due paragrafi dedicati alla correzione dei mosti, o meglio del loro titolo zuccherino. Che uno sia dedicato a correggere l'abbondanza di parti zuccherine » (mediante l'aggiunta di acqua, « meglio se piovana o di sorgiva, ma non salmastra »), non può troppo meravigliare. Non così la correzione della « deficienza » dello zucchero e il modo di supplirvi ». Però, scorrendo il « Quadro d'analisi dei mosti eseguite in provincia di Terra di Bari nell'autunno 1875 », in appendice al volume, si vede che non mancavano quelli con meno di 18° di zucchero, il che per le Puglie (e per ottenere vini da taglio) certo era poco. In tali casi, si legge nel libro in questione che il « *processo che offre buoni risultati pratici ed economici, e che dal campo della scienza è entrato in quello della pratica, è l'addizione di zucchero e (non o) di alcool, onde aumentare il grado alcolico del vino. Lo zucchero "più conveniente" è quello "cosiddetto grasso o biondo, di canna non raffinato, o di barbabietola, e che si ha sempre a buon prezzo dai diversi mercati"*. Quanto all'alcool il più indicato è il « *rettificato di vino e il rettificato di barbabietola a gradi 92 a 96* ». E sorvoliamo sulle modalità indicate per queste correzioni. Tutto semplice, allora, senza tante discussioni sulla loro liceità (allora non c'era ancora una legge speciale sulle sofisticazioni dei mosti e dei vini).



Vendemmia nei vigneti di Delano in California.

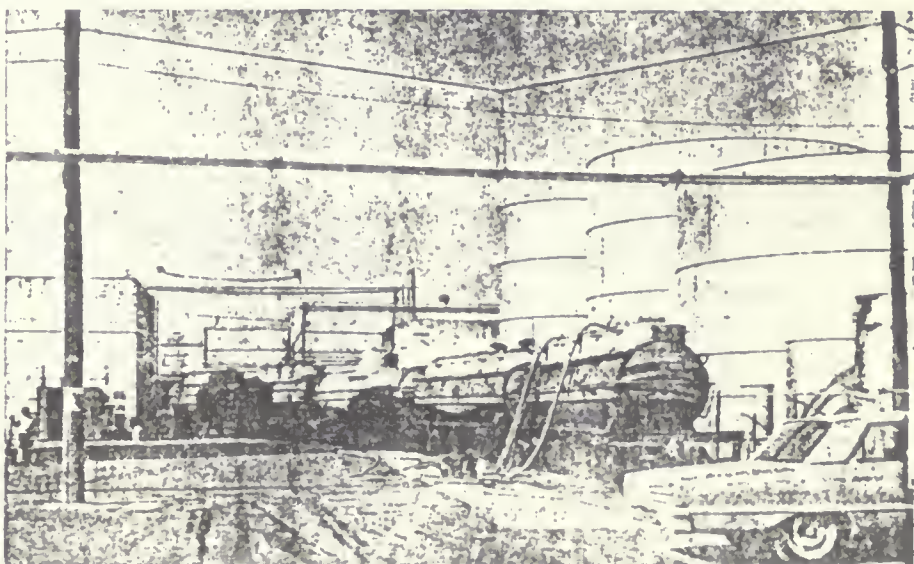
Ma ripeto che non è mio intendimento d'addentrarmi in un esame di quest'opera. Se mai, sarebbe il caso di parlare un po' del suo autore, che indubbiamente doveva essere una figura singolare. Ma le notizie di cui dispongo sono troppo frammentarie. Certo, era uomo d'ingegno, e di spirito innovatore. Abbiamo, fra l'altro, un suo opuscolo (del 1891), pubblicato sempre in Barletta, su un nuovo tipo di « *serbatoi e recipienti economici per uva pigiata, mosti e vini in tele impermeabili* », adatti sia per trasporti ferroviari, che per battelli (a vapore o a vela), e a dorso d'animali, anche per

paesi caldi o caldissimi (consigliabili anche « *per missionari cattolici* »!). E ancora, refrigeranti economici, pure da lui brevettati. Ed egli ottenne numerosi riconoscimenti (medaglie, diplomi) in Esposizioni e Mostre in Italia e all'estero, alle quali partecipò anche come giurato (fra il 1884 e il 1900).

Morì il 18 marzo 1907.

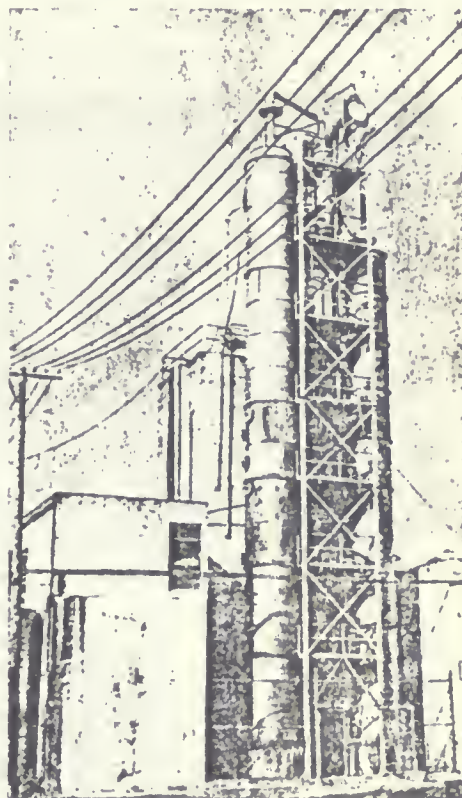
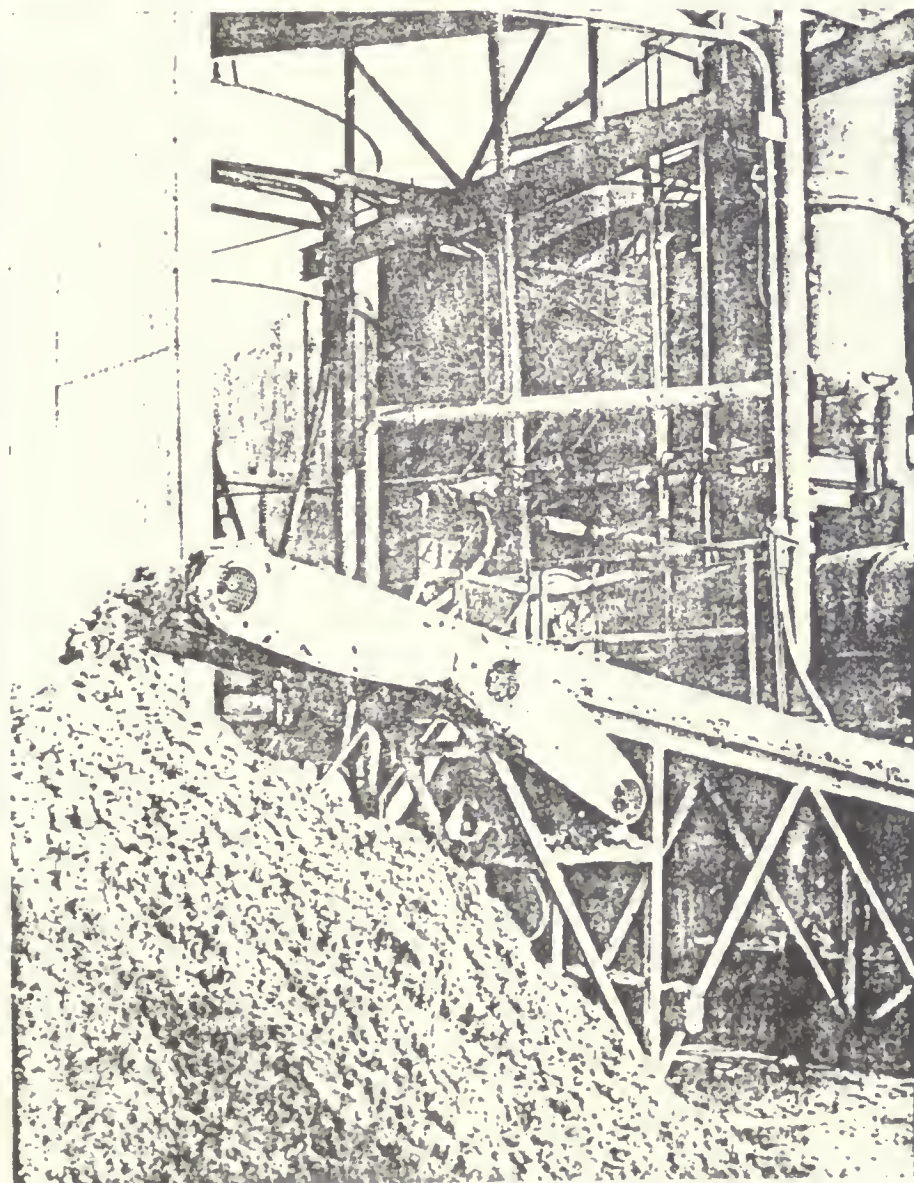
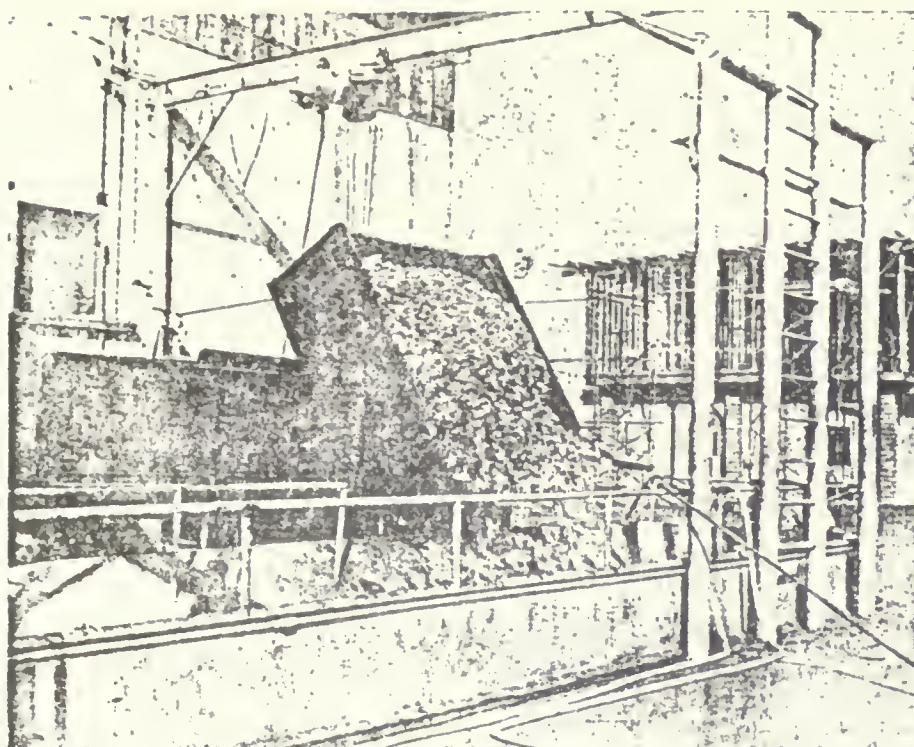
\* \* \*

Ma più che di lui intendo occuparmi del figlio: enotecnico Antonio PERELLI-MINETTI, uno dei più giovani Accademici Corrispondenti Stranieri dell'Accademia dei Lincei.



Carico di serbatoi ferroviari per vino nello stabilimento di Delano (il vino resta tutto l'anno all'aperto).





Colonne distillatrici.

ti-vinicola-distillatoria per farsi un viaggetto in Europa (quando non ne fa due, come durante lo scorso 1969). E in tali occasioni non manca d'intervenire a qualche nostra riunione accademica, come alle assemblee dell'Associazione Enotecnici Italiani. Partecipò anche all'ultima dell'A.E.I. tenutasi in Milano il 15 novembre u.s. in occasione del 4° SIMEI alla Fiera di Milano. E il Presidente dell'Associazione Enotecnici, enot. Emi-

Macchina per ridurre i raspi  
In trucioli.



lio Sernagiotto, lo salutò calorosamente quale decano degli enotecnici italiani, essendo diplomato alla Scuola di Conegliano proprio all'inizio del secolo (nel 1901)(2).

Ben a ragione il Sernagiotto junior ha detto che il Perelli-Minetti « è un Italiano che ha fatto onore alla sua Patria ». E volle ricordare l'inizio fortunoso della sua movimentata attività d'oltre Oceano. Partito senza neppure il passaporto su una vecchia nave francese, giunge in California (via Canada), dove, fra mille difficoltà e alterne vicende, riuscì a creare una delle più solide e potenti industrie enologiche californiane: la **A. PERELLI-MINETTI & SONS - Growers - Producers of Choice Wines & Brandies - P.O. Box 818 - DELANO (California)**.

Basta qualche cifra per dar una idea della grandiosità dell'azienda: circa 2.500 acri di vigneti (1 ettaro equivale a 2,47 acri), tutti perfettamente livellati, con una rete di condutture sotterranee in cemento di 30 cm di diametro per l'irrigazione — con una valvola di 5 pollici per l'uscita dell'acqua all'inizio di ogni filare di viti — e con un complesso di 30 km di tubazioni.

Capacità degli stabilimenti di Delano (per vini e succhi d'uva) 7 milioni di galloni (circa 250.000 ettolitri), di cui 80 mila in cemento armato, 40 mila in acciaio inossidabile per i vini (tutto all'aperto), e 32 mila per il brandy, prima che questo venga messo in barili da 2 ettolitri, questi in locali chiusi, per l'invecchiamento; oggi per economia di spazio i barili si dispongono sovrapposti in pile di 7

da 1.800 a 2.600 barili, che generalmente rappresentano un solo taglio, esistendo a tal fine tini di acciaio inossidabile da 200.000 galloni.

Naturalmente lo stabilimento è dotato del più moderno e potente macchinario. A questo proposito è interessante ricordare che la Ditta E. Sernagiotto di Casteggio gli fornì tre anni or sono il tipo più grande delle sue pigiatrici, della potenzialità di 600 q.li d'uva all'ora. Il Perelli-Minetti ne acquistò una in prova, come una « macchinetta » (egli l'avrebbe vo-

luta di una potenzialità <sup>164</sup> volte maggiore!), e se la portò in California come bagaglio sul transatlantico passeggeri, per poterla mettere subito alla prova. Gli è che egli nella sua « Vineria » deve smaltire giornalmente da due a tremila quintali d'uva della propria azienda. La vendemmia è solo parzialmente meccanizzata. Per essa si ricorre a operai messicani specializzati, ciascuno dei quali raccoglie in media da 8 a 10 quintali d'uva all'ora, guadagnando 6,50-7 dollari per ogni ora lavorativa (oltre 4.000 lire!).



L'enotecnico ANTONIO PERELLI-MINETTI (88 anni, legge senza occhiali, non ha bisogno di apparecchi acustici, nuota come un ventenne e viaggia per tutto il mondo) accanto a una batteria di barili del suo brandy.

(2) Per la storia: nello stesso anno il sottoscritto iniziava i suoi studi vitivinicoli presso la Scuola Enologica di Alba, dove aveva la fortuna di trovare, come suo primo Maestro di Viticoltura, il nonno del Presidente dell'A.E.I.: il prof. Raffaele Sernagiotto, che lo prendeva subito a benevolere. E da lui apprese anche la passione per gli studi non puramente scolastici e tecnici. (G. D.)



Nelle prime due-tre settimane di vendemmia si pigiano fino a 2.000 tonnellate d'uva al giorno; nel periodo vendemmiale (che si prolunga a stagione molto avanzata), si superano le 80 mila tonnellate. Per prelevare i campioni d'uva da ogni carico si usano particolari colee azionate meccanicamente.

I raspi vengono completamente eliminati mediante potenti macchine che li riducono in finissimi trucioli onde poter distillare le vinacce in alambicchi continui.

La « Vineria » Perelli-Minetti produce svariati tipi di vini che potremmo dire comuni da pasto, oltre a vini speciali tipo Sherry, Porto, e simili, nonché Moscati liquorosi, e Vermut dolce e secco. Il nostro « giovane » collega nell'ultima sua visita che mi fece a Torino nel novembre u.s. mi portò un variopinto campionario dei suoi prodotti perché potessi farmene un'idea. Com'era prevedibile, quelli da pasto « di normale consumo » non possono avere per noi particolare interesse; quelli « speciali » invece di più (caso molto frequente quando si degustano vini, diciamo così, esotici).

Naturalmente, pur restando sempre abbastanza lontani dai tipi originali dei nostri Paesi europei.

Il 50 per cento dei vini da pasto viene smerciato in bottiglie fra agosto e gennaio. Il brandy viene invecchiato (in fusti) da 2 a 10 anni a seconda delle marche. Si produce anche (con grandiosi alambicchi) alcool a 95°. E mosti concentrati con un grosso concentratore in acciaio inossidabile. Alla produzione di vapore provvede una caldaia di 1.000 cavalli ad alta pressione e 4 caldaie a bassa pressione.

Lo stabilimento è provvisto di un laboratorio chimico con le più moderne attrezzature, nel quale operano due chimici con un assistente. E ben si comprende come il nostro Perelli-Minetti sostenga che i nostri enotecnici debbano essere dei « veri e propri enochimici ». Ma anche dei provetti viticoltori. Cosa insospettata: egli mi dichiara che vari vini rossi da pasto ch'egli produce sono prodotti con uve di vitigni da lui ottenuti da seme, scelti fra varie centinaia di esemplari da lui stesso seminati! Naturalmente, senza controllare la fecondazione dei fio-

ri, ché egli non si è prefisso di fare il creatore di nuovi tipi secondo le regole della genetica; egli potrebbe dirsi un « pepinierista » come quelli che operavano nel Nord America nel secolo decimono.

\* \* \*

Il discorso potrebbe continuare a lungo, ché la straordinaria multiforme attività di Antonio Perelli-Minelli non può essere condensata in poche pagine. E meriterebbe di essere ben più efficacemente illustrata, infiorandola di gustosi aneddoti che meglio potrebbero far risaltare la sua eccezionale personalità.

Ma anche da queste brevi e disordinate note ci sembra che risulti più che giustificata l'affermazione che egli è veramente uno di quegli italiani che hanno fatto onore alla loro Patria, mai da lui dimenticata. E che bene a lui si addica il motto, col quale il padre suo chiudeva il libro che abbiamo qui sopra ricordato:

*« Volere è potere ».*

G. DALMASSO



Healdsburg, Cal., Oct. 25th. 98

Statement of 1 April 1956

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